The Paris Review

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Craig Nova, Bette Pesetsky, Elizabeth Tallent Fiction
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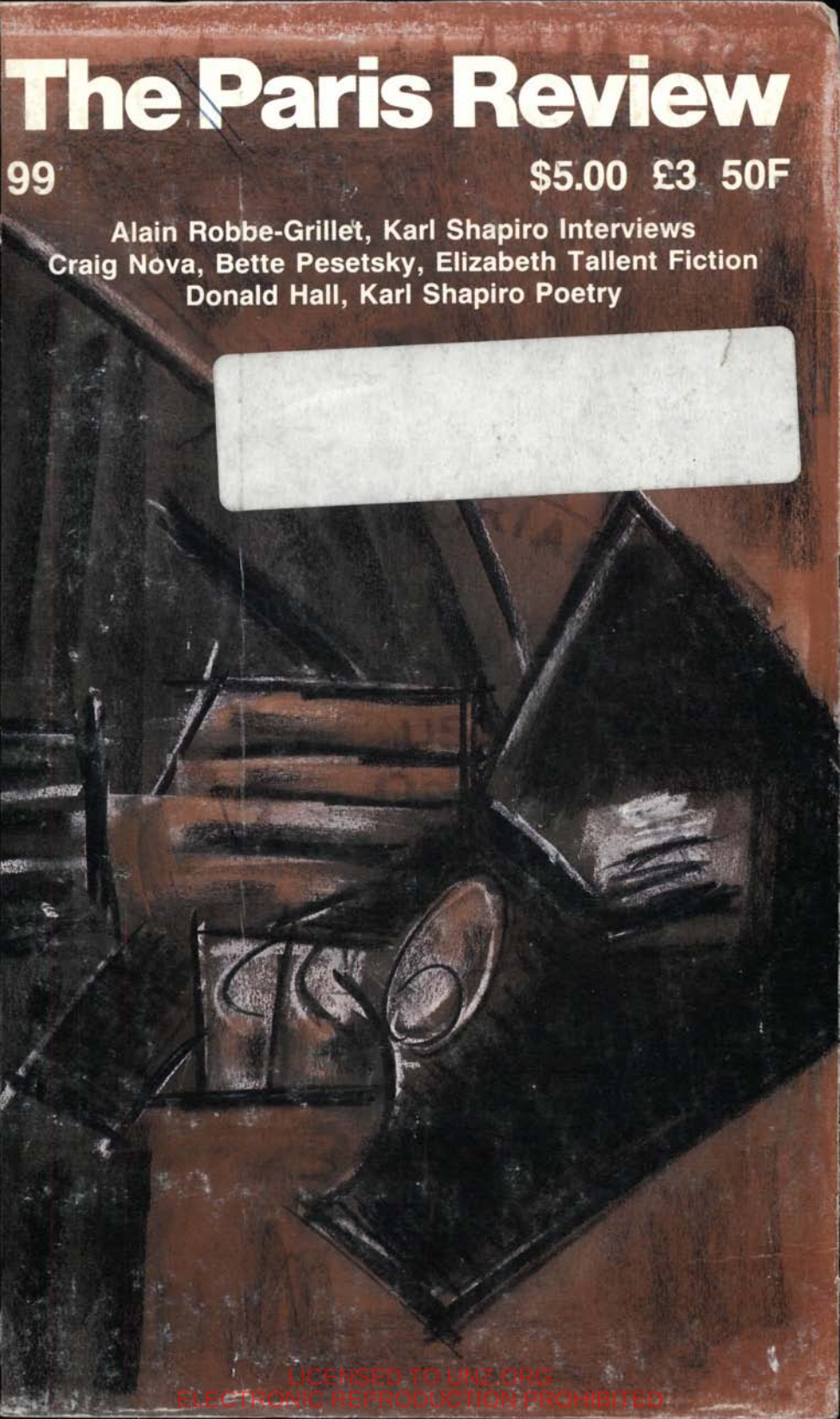

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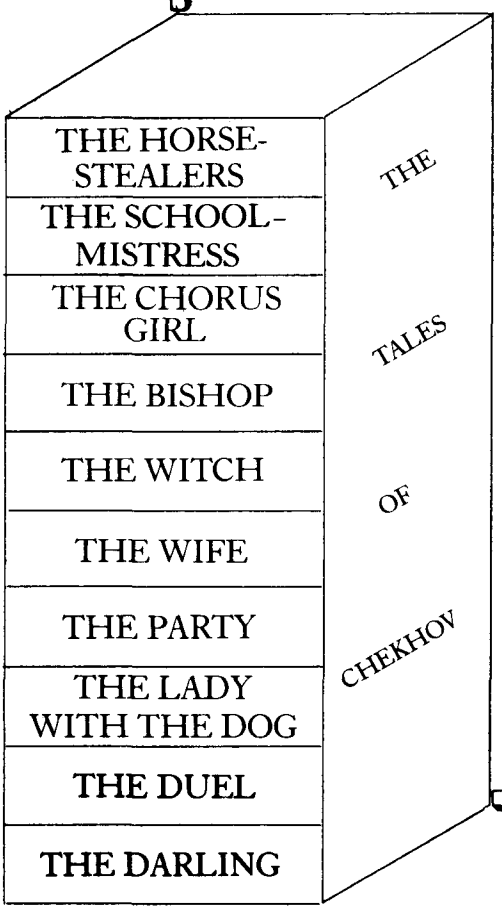
—ROBERT HASS



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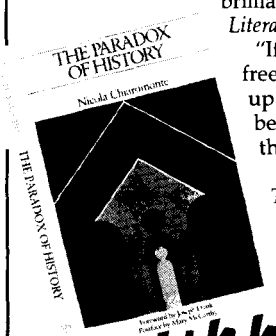

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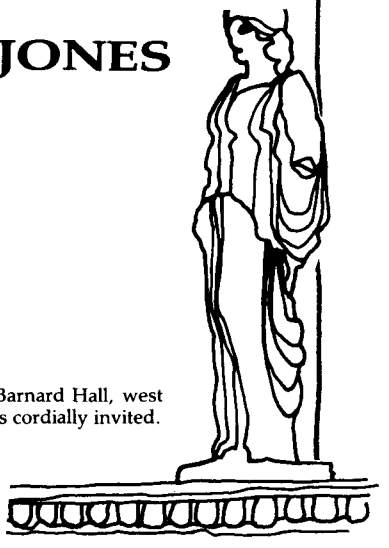

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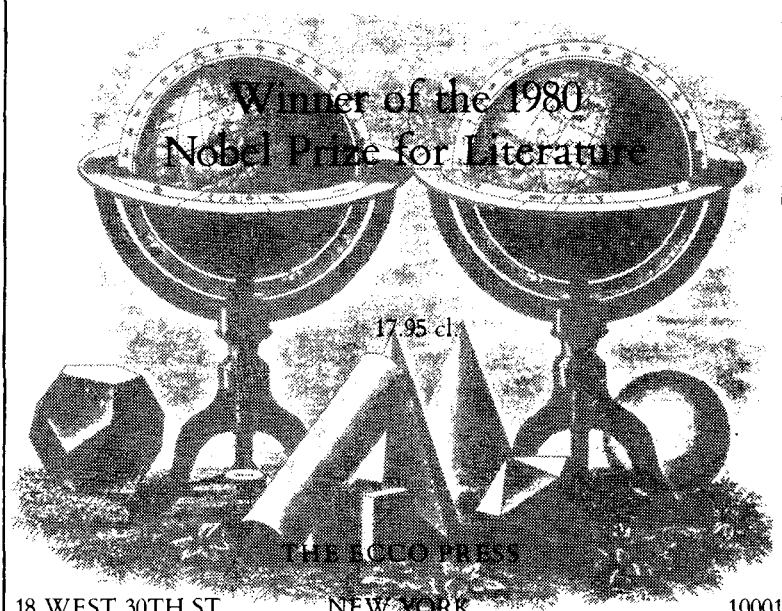

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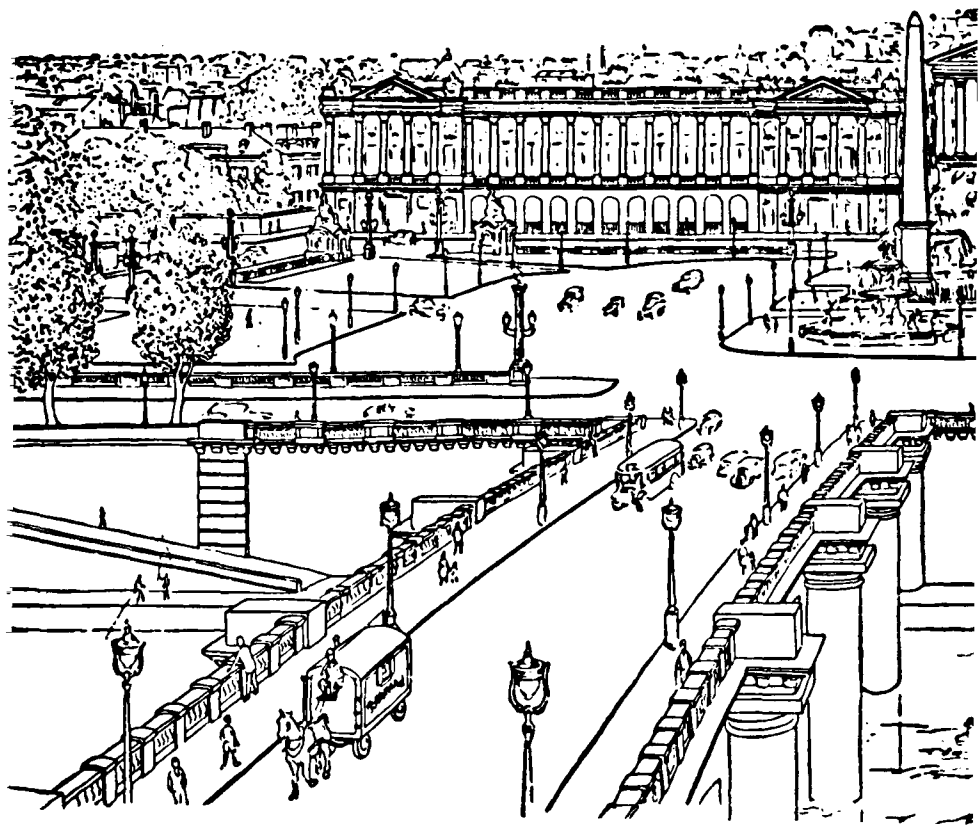

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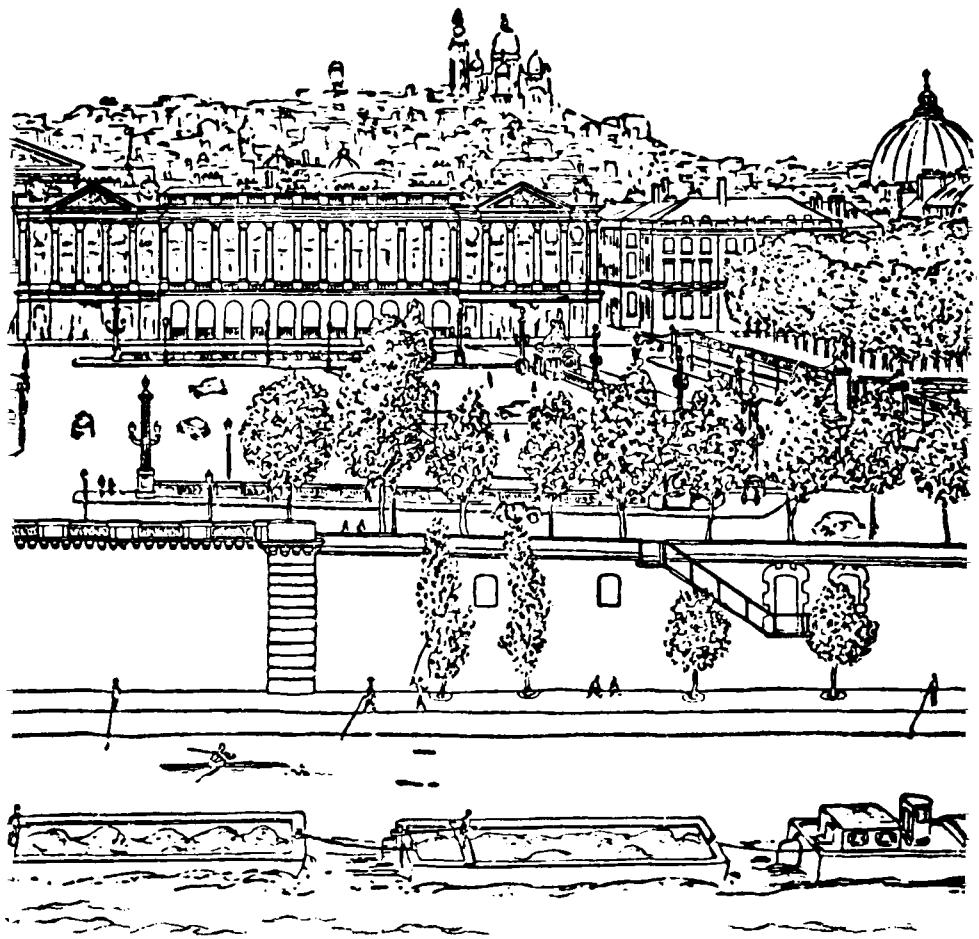

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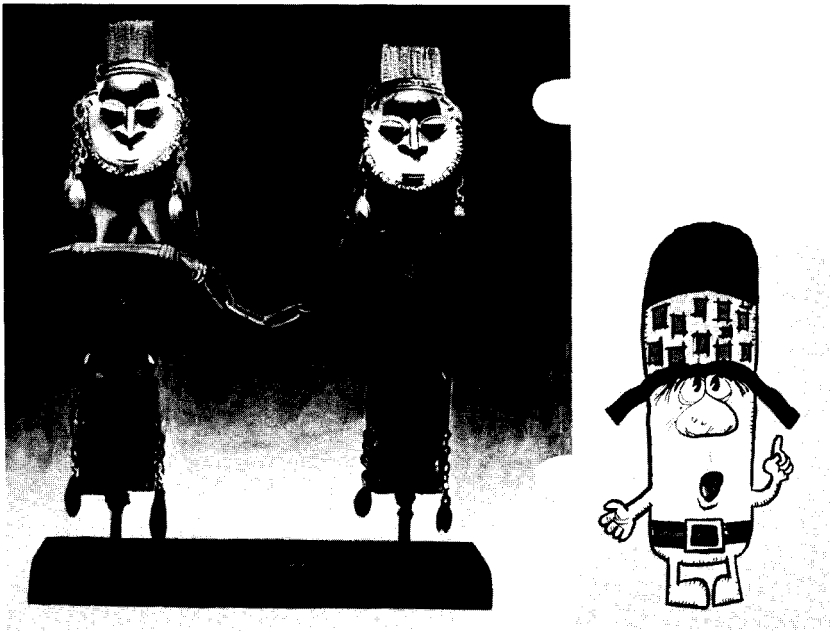

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Number 99

Interviews

Alain Robbe-Grillet	*The Art of Fiction XCI*	42
Karl Shapiro	*The Art of Poetry XXXVI*	182

Feature

Tom Randall and Judi Culbertson	*Permanent Parisians*	117

Fiction

Craig Nova	*Another Drunk Gambler*	103
Bette Pesetsky	*Piers the Impostor*	14
H. G. Sanders	*Two Stories*	77
Elizabeth Tallent	*Migrants*	219

Art

Donald Baechler	*Subjects and Objects*	87
Michael Hurson	*Two Drawings*	163

Poetry

Mary Barnard	*Song for the Northern Quarter*	166
Ruth Danon	*Three Poems*	139
Gavin Ewart	*Five Poems*	96
Brad Gooch	*Three Poems*	145
Donald Hall	*My Friend Felix*	169
Lincoln Kirstein	*Five Poems*	28
Jane Miller	*Peace Lyric*	175
N. Scott Momaday	*Three Poems*	160
Joyce Carol Oates	*Four Poems*	153
Toby Olson	*Shining Hour*	180
Robert Pack	*Clayfeld Renews His Vow*	177
Sarah Plimpton	*Three Poems*	157
Karl Shapiro	*At Auden's Grave*	217
David Trinidad	*Great-Grandmother Smith*	171

Notes on Contributors 230

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Piers the Impostor

Bette Pesetsky

My new boy friend is named Alexander. He is a dumpling of a man. We have reached the point in our relationship where we have begun to speak our histories. So far I've limited mine—I've been selective. But when we are alone, some evening, some night, I shall slip, I know. I shall lapse into Ira's adventure. Starting with the core of the tale, without losing its essence, I rethink it. I recall the times I've told the tale to lovers, to husbands, to groups at parties, and to half-strangers on airplanes. I realize that I have begun it at different points, sometimes when Ira assumes the new identity, sometimes starting with the purchase of the house by the lake, sometimes with an explanation of our lives. My explanations are a widening pool.

Alexander, I will say, have some coffee, have brandy, let me tempt you with a lemon-scented pastry. My brother Ira, I will add, had an adventure, a few perfect moments.

The point where an adventure begins is not easily determined. Life slides back and forth. I have loved various people, some worthy, some lacking in grace. I'll outfit no one with blame.

Ira and I and the family we came from lived a life that was

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slovenly, cluttered, lunatic. I would have said it then, I say it now. I was age fourteen, and my nature was not melancholy. Our mother ran a business from the ground floor rooms of our house. She was Stella of "Stella's Fashions—For the Large Woman." Among the lies I used to tell is that everything would have been different if our father had not died. How can a man that peripheral to our daily lives have changed anything? I think of friends who have lost their fathers. The casual dying of American fathers must be endemic. I can't speak for those friends, though. Perhaps their lives would have been different.

We lived in a dusty, narrow house off Mosholu Parkway in the Bronx on the very edges of commercial zoning. Around us were apartment houses, people looked down on us in our yard, staring, I believe, from darkened windows, and counting the leaves of our trees. Our mother had a reputation that spread from gossip—for I don't believe she ever advertised. But women found her, heavy Russian-style women, fur-wrapped gryphons traveling from distant boroughs—coming for her drapes, her tucks, her folds. She was not cheap. The customers arrived mostly in long black cars, and their drivers would pace up and down in front of the house.

The business claimed the three best rooms of the house. All that was left to us downstairs was the kitchen and the enclosed back porch. The house had a bad smell. It was no more than the stench of women whitened with talcum spreading the luxuriant odors of their estrous cycles. Our mother herself sprayed the rooms with heavy perfumes. At night the heat sizzled at all times from radiators. Our mucous membranes withered, and our lungs exploded in catarrh. In good times, two old women chatting to each other in Polish came to help, working their Singers behind a curtain. No, no, Mother would shriek at them. Where are your eyes? Fix it, you idiots!

Think now of my dressmaker-mother. Bolts of material cushioning her walls. From scarlet to midnight blue, from rugs of velvet deep as molasses to finely veined silks. This stitcher of clothes never made me a dress. I swear that. She never took up needle and thread for us.

All right, I take away the blame. She was on her knees most

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of the day batting her eyes up at her clients. On the other hand, let me explain about slide fasteners that caught the flesh, brass pins that nicked the knees, pointed-tipped scissors pricking inward where bellies rested loop on loop. Sometimes the women would weep standing in the fitting room like apostates in thick pink corset satin.

I was a brilliant child. I say this without shame. My I.Q. was often tested. I was a fierce and ugly competitor. I was a striver and where did it get me? All those Best Papers. Ira was smart but lackadaisical. He spent his days playing baseball in Van Cortlandt Park. The worst time was when I was eight and skipped a grade. That put me in Ira's class. He couldn't stand that. It took him two years, but when he was eleven they finally skipped him.

I make our mother sound like a widow living in that house with the support of her children on her back. At the time the adventure begins she was married to our father, a former wartime sweetheart. There is nothing unusual in the marriage of my mother and my father. Their life was full of cowardices, omissions, bleating complaints. My father handled that by acquiring an American occupation. He traveled. Any advertisement that promised—Be able to leave at a moment's notice—he answered.

When he was successful he made grand gestures. He bought me when I was ten years old a set of riding clothes—jodhpurs, high leather boots, a jacket, the right hat. When I put on those clothes I could hardly see my trembling reflection in the mirror. I developed dreams of sweat before my time. One year he gave Ira a complete American Flyer train.

The house by the lake, like the riding clothes or the American Flyer train, was not given in lieu of love. Not at all. Our father loved us, there are different frequencies of love. These gifts were part of his nature—he gave them whenever he could. Day to day life was hard for him. I can't trace his past enough to explain. I can't tell you what I don't know. His name was Edward, and he was the last son of six children.

The spring I turned fourteen my father had a good year. He had been assigned the Maritime Provinces as his territory. On his way home he bought us the house by the lake.

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Can't you guess the reaction of Stella of "Stella's Fashions"? She swore that she would have no part of it. Keep it, she said. Our father was home, and he wooed her, slowly, tactfully. And mother began to tell her customers that she was going up to her summer place. And that July we packed suitcases and boxes and filled the back of the station wagon that belonged to "Stella's Fashions."

Mother would do the driving. Me, me, me, she shouted. He's left me with everything to do. The two of you will behave. Bad enough we have hours on the road—a woman and two children. I closed my eyes, riding most of the trip that way. It was the sensation of leaving that I was cherishing. The destination was not important.

When we arrived, the house rose up in front of us, a small grey palace. We gasped, and we rushed at it like raiders. My father had named the house like a boat. *The Stella* was done in red and yellow scrolls on a sign that hung from two short chains in the middle of the porch roof.

The house was the product of summer architect Miller Trumbell, circa 1920. A period piece with too many rooms for us. We were city children. We swam, we walked the beach, we were bored within the week. We whined to go home, we raged against peace and quiet. The mosquitoes are killing me, Ira said. Their life replenished from his shoulders. The calamine kid, my father called him. I blistered my chest that first week. My body, I believed, responding to the environment, the sand, the lack of company. My red rose, my father said.

There we sat in an original Miller Trumbell. We didn't even know enough to put up the blue awnings packed away in the cellar. What was happening with Stella of "Stella's Fashions"? She loved the house by the lake. Every morning she would bind her hair in a silk scarf, oil her body and carry an old blue blanket down to the sand. That we knew no one, that we spoke to no one, didn't bother her. Let the *goyim* be, she said. She hummed to herself, stretched out on her blanket, and with her hand made temporary gashes in the sand.

This was the only summer our father ever spent in that house.

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I try to remember him walking on the beach, bathing in the water, urging us to come along. But I am not certain that it is true. In October he died. Mother received the telephone call. The will was unexpected. My father was not the kind of man who makes a will. Almost all of his worldly goods, he left to his beloved wife Stella. He gave everything to our mother except the summer house at the lake. That he left equally to Ira and to me.

Our mother didn't seem to mind. Why should I? she said. What's yours is mine. But she had to get in those little digs. Sweethearts, she'd say, I've painted your inheritance with a swell coat of all-weather white. From a bottle of suntan lotion, I've paid your taxes.

Through everything I remained the perfect, the terrific student. Two of my teachers told my mother that I should go to a private school. They said that as much as they could give me I deserved more. They tried to persuade her, but she would have nothing of it. Was she jealous? She was the second of four sisters. Fools—every one of them, she said. We had to take her word for that, because by the time we were born she was not talking to those sisters. Who needs them? she said. I could have gone on and become a real designer, she said. We believed her. Her parents could see no sense in educating her further. On our mother's side the heritage is one of peddlers. There was no pretense of scholars, no students of the Talmud, no rabbis.

Our father's side is more of a mystery, although we knew our grandfather. He was a man who lived with us for three years until he married again. He slept in Ira's room. The day he left, our mother spat in his direction. An old man, she said, should at least be faithful to a memory—fifty-three years married, and it's gone just like that.

This grandfather used to read to us tales. It was from him that we first heard about *The Three Princes of Serendip.* I consider this an important story, he said. Serendipity, Grandfather said, is the moving force in our family.

Grandfather was a naturalist. And famous, Grandfather said, a famous naturalist. Sometimes he said that he had been at

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the Universität at Berne or the Universität at Stalzbourg or even the Polytech at Moscovy.

Our grandfather's name was to be found nowhere. Not in any university catalogue. One day wandering through the section of the library given over to Germanic languages, Ira pulled down a book. Drawn to it, he said later, by the serpentine vine printed on the spine. It was in the pages of that book that Ira found grandfather's name. He had existed.

The adventure is coming closer. A return to the house by the lake became a goal as diligently pursued as any errant thread. We will go, Mother said. She alternated between commander or coaxer or wheedler or widow. I am your bread and butter, she would declare.

Ira went out day after day in search of summer employment, a hopeless task for any unskilled child of small build with black wavy hair and cautious voice.

And the conversation went.

"I'm not going back to the lake," Ira said. It was the summer after our father died. "I'm going to stay in the city and get a job."

"You?" our mother said. "You? Who will hire you—I want to know? A pipsqueak like you?"

"A whole summer in that place will kill me," Ira said.

"You'll love it," Mother said, her voice at its flirtatious best.

While Ira was having his adventure, was I blind and dumb? Was the air more pungent? Did I lick the salt from my lips? I had begun to read romances where lovers pressed vanilla kisses on closed paper lips. But of Ira's adventure, I never knew, I never guessed. He burned with deceit. I marked only the passing of some chimera.

We went to the lake the next year too—all of us. It was the last time for Ira. But Mother and I kept going back every summer until I left home. Afterwards, Mother continued to go alone to the lake. She left that house to Ira and me in her will when she died. Her new lawyer hadn't realized that she couldn't leave us the house. It was ours already.

What irritates? Sometimes the smallest burdens. I was the one responsible for arranging the rentals for the summer house.

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Ira was quick to take his share of the money—but I did the work. It was geographic, you see. Ira lived in Los Angeles. I lived in New York City. Then came the year when I was getting my divorce. I had no energy to spare. I turned the summer house over to an agency. They handled everything, the taxes, the advertising, the cleaning up after tenants.

One day second homes were suddenly in boom times. The lake had changed, built-up, became fashionable. We had an offer for the house. I telephoned Ira with the news of the prospective buyer. I could hear his wife's voice in the background. "What does she want?" she kept saying.

"Fantastic news," Ira said. "God, can we use the money. Sell—don't hesitate—sell."

The offer was accepted. I wrote to Ira. Did he want anything from the house? Any mementoes? He called me. What was I to think? I don't believe that my reaction was unusual. He wanted a suitcase. I didn't remember the suitcase. It used to be on the top shelf in the closet under the stairs. Be careful, he said, it's very heavy.

A suitcase? My brother wanted an old suitcase. What came to me was that something of our father's was there, something concealed, a treasure not to be shared with me. Perhaps news of the sale had jolted Ira's memory—made him remember. Never mind that some tenant might have walked off with the suitcase. There was urgency in Ira's voice. Yes, I definitely had heard urgency.

On Friday I drove to the house directly from my office. I went at once to the closet. It was a dark closet, built beneath the stairs, and smelling of cozy dampness. The suitcase was on the top shelf, a boxy rectangle, canvas covered and yellowed from coats of varnish surrounded by a girdle of three green stripes.

I was dignified at first. I dragged the suitcase into the sunroom. The suitcase wasn't locked, and it was empty. Ira had said it was empty. I patted the brown cloth lining and finding one corner loose, I ripped it. It came away easily, bits of glue like rough chunks of amber hanging onto the threads. It was a roller-coaster then. I plunged into the elasticized pockets, tore the stitching, making those terrible cuts in my palm. Under

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the lining was a thin layer of cotton batting still startlingly white. I grabbed at it, and the cotton burst forth in tiny tutus of gauze. The suitcase, though, retained its integrity, its shape. That's when I went into the kitchen and found the cleaver. Holding it like an axe, I chopped.

The suitcase cannot be located, I wrote to Ira. The house was sold. Ira said that he would fly in for the closing. He said he had other business in the city, but I knew that was a lie. His wife put him up to it, I was certain. Go yourself, she must have said, see it for yourself. As if I would do anything—as if it weren't all down in black and white.

The actual business of the sale went quickly. It was concluded in the city. The new owners were represented by a lawyer. Afterwards, Ira and I were in high spirits. I hugged my brother. "Look at you," I said, "all California—the hair, the clothes. Come back to my apartment and we'll celebrate."

"Let's go," Ira said.

We stopped at a small store I knew, and we bought chilled wine, thin slices of Scotch smoked salmon, curves of ripe brie, crisp bread, and more fruit than we could eat. In my apartment I spread the food before us on the low glass-topped coffee table. We feasted and were happy. I poured more wine into Ira's glass. He was relaxed. I thought he seemed younger, more brotherly.

I was careful. "Sorry about the suitcase," I said.

Ira waved his hand. "Nothing," he said. "Just a whim."

"But you wanted it—and it was gone. I don't really remember that suitcase. Was it yours? One that you used?"

Ira laughed. "It belonged to Piers Angell."

"Who?"

"I've told you," Ira said. "Surely, I've told you?"

"No."

"Me," Ira said. "I was Piers Angell." Ira leaned back in his chair, tilting the wine glass towards his lips. He smiled at me. "A toast," he said, "to the brief life of Piers Angell."

This is the adventure of Piers. These are Ira's words:

I am not ever to be thought of as a boy of boldness and daring, although I have a tested I.Q. of 170. I lived my childhood in

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a daze, spent it with trains and Meccano sets, kept stocks of chemicals, had secret thoughts of destructive devices. I was a popular boy, I had friends, I had girls. I had many dreams formed from movies and magazines and stories.

Piers was born the summer after my father died. What I wanted can be fully understood. I wanted to emigrate, I wanted to go into exile, I was willing to impersonate a pilgrim. I was however a boy not a warrior. I didn't want to go away to the summerhouse by the lake. Keep your lakes—I'll stay in the confines of wash basins. I wanted independence. You have a heart of steel, mother said.

Was summer life different from winter life? We were a family without set routines, our days moved by the demands of trade, we ate as we could. I imagined my escape every night. By day my lack of cunning was apparent. I did as I was told. I swam, I roamed the area. Do anything, mother would say. Only leave me alone.

I stalked the beach. The beach itself curves, and two houses are visible to us from the left, but the bend of sand hides one—and that is the one that matters. It was the big white Victorian with green cloth awnings, a steamship of a house, a half-mile away. The house belonged to the Rampels.

Picture me, a boy of sixteen, spending his afternoons in town at a store near the movie theater—ice cream, sodas, odds and ends. I would sit there in a corner booth, a scarred, mutilated booth, covered with initials of love.

Think of old Mrs. Rampel—old to me anyway—grey hair, stiff walk, old-fashioned manners. I saw her one day, knew who she was when the younger woman with her, a summer visitor, spoke to her. The two women escaping from the sun to sit near me in that store, to sip sodas, to talk. Did they look at me? Did they see me? I was nothing to them.

All summer people look alike. The postman, indifferent to our identity, dropped our mail into the wicker basket attached by a slender nail to the porch railing. The mail seldom varied—advertisements from local stores, glossy postcards from Mother's best customers spending their Augusts by larger lakes with

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warmer weather, and the occasional plea from a city relative. When we remembered, we emptied the wicker basket.

I was the one who saw the envelope. The blue envelope—caught between postcard and hardware sale circular—was as thick as a pencil. It was not our letter. The sender was Mrs. N. Rampel—outgoing mail intended for San Francisco—given to the postman. The letter had traveled only as far as our house. I held the envelope between thumb and forefinger, made a cave of it, the paper flap popped up. The glue had been dampened by a parched tongue.

Dear Friend—began the letter. I sighed. Much time had passed between letters, but the weather was fine, the lake was calm, and all were in good health. Then suddenly the tone of the letter changed. A sadness entered, regrets. Mrs. Rampel was growing older—and thought again of her brother, her poor brother who had died young. Every year she invited his son to the lake. Her nephew. Perhaps this year he would come and not disappoint her. The only son of her dead brother—his namesake. Piers Angell.

You assume that it is hard to be an impostor, beyond the ken of a boy. I say it is easy. I say that identity is casually worn. And for me to become Piers Angell was no more than the assemblage of information. I read that letter from *Dear Friend* to its closing *Your Friend.* Bit by bit I gleaned what I needed. The nephew's name was Piers Angell. He lived in Wyoming. His father was dead. He lived with his mother and her second husband. He was fifteen. He was interested in nature and had requested a field book of flora and fauna of the Northwest for his most recent birthday. He and his mother had last visited Mrs. Rampel in New York City the winter Piers was ten. The invited guest who never arrived, whose room was prepared, whose sad arrival was expected on the second Monday in August.

Perhaps it was madness. The truth is that I did not consider the dangers. I decided just like that. Piers had never come before. Why shouldn't he arrive now? Did I even think of appearance? That Piers might be blonde, that he might look nothing like a boy descended from peddlers and real naturalists. No,

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not for a moment. All I regretted was that I must be fifteen. I was sixteen. I was about to lose a year.

The details, the logistics were amazingly simple. I packed the greater half of my clothes in one of the suitcases that our father had left in the house, a huge suitcase with three green stripes. On Mondays the train from the city arrived at one o'clock. I could then reasonably show up at the Rampels somewhere between one-thirty and a quarter to two. I combed my hair, put on clean pants, and a plaid shirt that I had ironed.

I had ordered one of the town taxis to pick me up at the intersection of Meadoway and Lakeside Road just past the Shell Station. I dragged the suitcase through the jimson weeds and up the embankment behind our house to the road and began to walk to my rendezvous. The suitcase was heavy, and I was sweating when I reached my destination. It was all right. I looked as if I had spent the day on trains. The man who drove the taxi didn't care where he took me. Summer people were all strange. The charge was the same—a flat rate for less than five miles.

The maid answered the door. Mrs. Rampel was called.

"Piers?" she said.

"Yes ma'am."

It began so easily. My new aunt, her arm around my shoulders, guiding me through the large dining room and out onto the porch where lunch was served. Several strangers smiled at me.

"Look," my aunt said, "who has arrived! It's Piers."

I had never imagined people in the house. I had only seen Mrs. Rampel and the friend and once a man whom I had thought was probably Mr. Rampel walking down the beach near the house.

That same man now stood up and held out his hand. "Good to have you here, Piers."

"Yes sir," I said and shook hands.

Everyone smiled at me. I was running on sheer child's nerve. A song of introductions began. I nodded, I whispered, my hand was damp.

"The boy must be hungry," said my uncle.

"Of course," my aunt said.

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Later I learned from notes and envelopes that my uncle was named Nathaniel and my aunt was Elsa. Wyoming proved no problem. From a bookcase in the sunroom I took an encyclopedia volume labelled *Vascu* to *Zygote* up to my room.

But that first afternoon I put on my swimming trunks and went for a trial walk down the beach to where my mother sat on the sand.

"Hello," I called.

Mother looked up and squinted into the light. "Hot dogs," she said, "in the fridge."

"Right," I said. "For later."

I turned around and headed back to the Rampels. Could I tell my mother that my stomach was full of broiled fish, tomatoes, fresh bread, peaches in wine? I did a cartwheel. My new summer life had begun.

At intervals I offered the Rampels items acquired from the encyclopedia—where to pick the best specimens of *Castilleja linariasefolia* or a discussion of sage grouse. I even walked down the stairs singing *Whoopee ti yi yo, git along little dogies, for you know Wyoming will be your new home.*

There was nothing that I wouldn't do for authenticity.

The Rampel house shut up every evening regularly at eleven. I established a routine. Twenty minutes after the house grew quiet, I left by the front door. I always wore my swimming trunks. I would run down the beach to *our* house. I'm getting into condition for hockey, I would say. Every night I slept in my own bed.

Once Mother inquired, "Didn't you eat anything today?"

I learned then to remove what I considered to be my day's food from the refrigerator and put it into a paper bag. The bags I buried in the sand by the road. I lived by the rigors of deception, the thoughtful reply, the pause.

Mornings, I made enough noise to be told to cut the racket, then having firmly established my presence, I would run back down the beach stopping just before I reached the Rampel house to get wet in the lake.

If anyone in the Rampel house had ever checked my room at night and found me absent, it was never mentioned. Of course, I left the bed rumpled. My clothes were washed and

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ironed in the Rampel house. I had never looked better. I even put on some weight.

I overheard Aunt Elsa remarking to her husband one evening, "He looks nothing like brother—nothing at all."

"Not in appearance," her husband said, "but he has your brother's spirit."

"Yes," Aunt Elsa said, "yes, the spirit is there."

I believed that I was safe for the summer, but at the end of two weeks Aunt Elsa suddenly asked me which train I was scheduled to take. The invitation to Piers had been for two weeks. There would be new guests arriving.

"But next summer," Aunt Elsa said, "would you like to come for an entire month? Uncle Nathaniel and I would be pleased to have you here."

"Yes ma'am," I said.

Aunt Elsa put me down on her calendar for the month of August.

The problem was that *we* were not to leave the lake for another ten days. Where could I hide? I was now known, I would be seen, I would be recognized. The first night after Piers, bound for Wyoming, had departed from the Rampels, I developed a great pain. I moaned, refused to leave the house, could not be coaxed into the sunlight. The doctor who was called found nothing wrong. Summer doctor, my mother said. She became worried. We closed up the house and went back to the city. I recovered.

I planned the next summer carefully. I offered no resistance to the idea of going to the house by the lake in August. Growing up at last, Mother said. The big shot! On the first of August, I took my suitcase and a large box of chocolates carried from the city and rang the doorbell of the Rampel house. Piers had returned for the last time.

That was Ira's adventure. What a wonderful time he must have had—the meals, the servants, the cool Protestant elegance. And just imagine the strength of character needed to keep such a secret all to yourself during those summers. I personally

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couldn't have done it. I bet you couldn't either, Alexander. You would have spilled the beans.

I know what you are thinking. I look at your bull-shaped head. I can interpret your snorting snickers. The adolescent boy and girl rebelling against the domineering mother. What a classic situation! Then the boy escapes into fantasy. That's what you are thinking, and you are welcome to your thoughts, mister. If Ira says it happened, then it happened. I try to remember what I was like, what Ira was like. Who behaved right, who behaved badly.

When did I begin staying away? I knew that I was supposed to be the devoted daughter, like it had been arranged, like Bette Davis in that movie. But I never jumped into that role. Even when Mother now putting on weight hurt her ankle, I forced her to hire a stranger to fetch and carry. Then that summer when I became pregnant, I drove to the house by the lake just to tell her. "What?" my mother said. "What?" But I ran back to the car, to the man waiting for me in the car.

If I had known, though, if Ira had told me about the possibilities of a secret life that altered everything, that could make you be polite and kind the way he was those last years before he went away, perhaps I wouldn't have had to leave that old woman sitting alone in the sand, kicking and screaming.

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Five Poems by Lincoln Kirstein

Hustler

From The Deep-Souf:
"Fer nigras doan-care none;
ah lern meh erleh, nevah trus' a one.
Snow, over Thule; felt an engin' crack.
Safteh-system shot. Almos' blew mah stack.
Mah engineeh, a shif'less culud man,
(with some whait-blud.) He dun a bes' he can.
No gud enuf. He paniks: whar's ma chute?
Man, if we ditch naow, it'll be a Beaut!"

2 motors flaring stoked their raucous joke;
twin fans, reversed, sucked up stiff acrid smoke.
Wild rampage of his clumsy engineer
fouling the shrouds and tackle of his gear.
He'd jerked his ripcord blunt inside the plane,
hysteria smothering cushioned insane
ballooning bubbles of raw muffled silk.

"Man! That nigra. He turn whait as milk!"

Routine disaster over Labrador,
good engines feathering 3 outa 4,
flaming for minutes, fried past any bet,
yet made it into Gander, and no-sweat.
Hairy; scary. Though his canceled prayer
drains waste confessional:
"Ah jus' doan care . . ."

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Count or discount hours clocked inside 3 years,
time-and-a-half to prove or disprove fears
he's hardly had the time to tag. So,—now!
Where is he?
In an air-corps, anyhow.

A rangy stud of 22 or 3,
checks lonesome citizens professionally.
A feral night-hawk in a 2-tone shirt
leans at the bar; malignly sips the hurt
of his cropped wings; acts wise to let you think
he'll swap true-stories should you stand him drink.
A uniform's no-go in dawns of seedy peace;
silk-scarf's thin prink, taut trousers' jack-knife crease,—
a cut-rate sportsman's sullen smiles caress
his spoil of leisure in sham fancy-dress.

"Dumb haigh-school punks train'd cheapeh on the groun'
they call 'kay-dets'. It sorta make it soun'
fantastic. Oh, aneh fool kin lern him haough to fly
ez long as he doan try –it ina sky . . ."
Who does he think he is?
Sorta laik to know
ez long as you doan try an' tell him so.
Get him to bed. Lay him down hard & straight.
Test his brick belly. Weigh his perfect weight.
Go ahead; do him. Trapped in his locked knot
he's holding onto everything he's got
as if to make it matter.
Yet, to whom?

Bored, aimless, hapless, in a fetid room
first-times are unused over and over.
for each bribed nerveless avid rover.

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Luckless? One calls it anarchy's design,
rough-weather, meager guess-work, spongy spine.
Grudged stingy auspices lurch on hit or miss,
a servile schedule's shallow armistice.
Spasmodic mainsprings sag. Disgruntled boys
juggle morosely with expensive toys.
Ingenious turbines in high languid speed
purr with an animal's complacent greed.
Scowling cub-tigers stir in winter-sleeps,
dreaming fresh-kill, they rouse and play for-keeps.

Sleep well, sergeant. It's what you're hired to do.
Our education's taken care of you.
Unheeded threats blare their gigantic taunt
from guessless menace as may ever haunt
a hobbled hero's alien enterprise.
No stringent crisis firms him otherwise.

Our skies are crammed with unexploded stars
colliding further than the faintest wars.

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Taxi

Owns his own cab. Not that ole 2-ton Mack-truck.
Ageless, balding, pushing 60,–
but swears he still has all the luck.

Trucks: they're for kids or young-men. He got him sense.
Why knock his self out afore his time?
Good doctor, great wife, both Immense

when he took that recent stroke & almos' died.
So, takes it easy; bed by 9;
this hacking simple; just a joy-ride.

Nice guy; wry smile. Easy does it. Hop right in.
It's pleasant driving with this joe.
You like? He'll gab. If not, his spin

hurries no trouble. So, here, now: let's talk.
30-year-man. In combat? Sure.
Artillery-mules! Could they balk!

Would they! Did they! He allows them critturs war
jus' 1-way to shove guns up on
Salerno beach-head, down-coast far

as Kay-See-No. From Arkinsaw, he knew his mules;
transferred to M.P.s for The Rhine.
Mules! In *artillery*! Yup. No rules

to buck or abide by. Remember,–one-time:
Frankfürt; big railroad-bridge blocks us,–
and Patton, 'Blood & Guts', or I'm

a liar! Him cussing, not loud. Not mean. Sad.
Bridge,–too low. We need them bridges.
Patton, sweating; looks real bad.

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Biggest gun you nevah saw. Bridge won't take it.
Can't git thru. We gotta blow that bridge.
But, ah! One expert knows how to make it:

jus' let air outa this fucking gun's fat tires,–
half-out, an ole trucker's simple trick.
We squeeeezes under! Patton admires

this joe's smart savvy. Soldier, he says: "Cute trick . . ."
Says so, his self. Patton says that!
More'n one-way to skin a mule. We'll lick

them dumb krauts yet. Gun greases thru. Wars, all over,–
15 years. Joe still backs The Brass:
New Year's Eve. Taxi's taken cover

waiting in-line outside that Mayflower Hotel.
Ike's inside; some big-shot banquet
inside. Joe knows his limo very well,–

a long black job. Its driver played his radio
too long. Battery gone, plumb dead.
Ike comes out, climbs in. Dam' car won't go.

Joe hauls his cab outa that long taxi-line;
gooses the White House limousine.
Ike, from the rear, waves, thumbs-up, V-ictory sign.

Joe still has the luck. Few share such tricks to lend.
Peace, war, truce, all won by nudges.
Thanks. Watch your step. Have a naice week-end.

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Sunny Jim

Busy, busy: 6 A.M.,– and so,–on:
Olympia De Luxe Dinerette.
Patsy's in by 5; Steve and Spike since dawn.
Ten regulars by 7, all set,
crowding their cabin.

The usual: orange-juice: "One large Oh-Jay",
pressed fresh, squeezed outa no can;
solid vitamins, one last witching way
rich orchards solace wan urban man.
Sun-Kist. Delicious.

Spiro, Stavros; they're cousins,–(Spike & Steve);
their greasy-spoon; maybe not too clean,–
(clean enough), tho' the food's first-rate, so we've
made it ours. Greek-American cuisine;
one waiter: Sunny Jim.

Spread flat, daily news fogs its blurred fable.
Coffee, fresh-brewed, sizzling eggs on fry. Meanwhile,
threading tight tables, Jim's quite able
to wigwag menus by thumb or smile
to Patsy's hot kitchen.

No new news. Same old shit. Murder, rape. War.
We'd best read Jim's sunburned pelt,
bronzed skull, shaved neck, while outside, trucks roar,
sirens scream. Fire! Fire! Inside, we've felt
Jim's easeful presence.

Animal aura, cool amidst flurries,–
Smokey Bear in clean jeans. Former cowboy?
Sand-hog? Lumber-jack? Past him, Patsy scurries
fast, her full tray. Goosey fingers annoy:
"Jim! Keep your paws off!"

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Jim who? What's his story? Stone-deaf, stone-dumb,
blanked at birth, stern genetics have won
with no sorrow. He's serene, just stays mum
on sums terrene or lunar. Save one:
strong carnal ardor.

On our way to pay, thump his hunky back.
Charged ergs and dynes might skim off on us.
We break fast on his hush, his soundless lack
of noisy voicing: snarl, bark, snit, fuss,–
his seamless quiet.

Distilling bluff health, sap pulped from fresh fruit,
Jim's daemons beg not nor churlishly boast.
He dishes side-orders of silence, mute
modest feastlets: O-Jay, whole-grain toast.
Eggs, sunny-side. Up.

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Look, Ma! I'm Dancing!

Stage-struck as a girl, Doreen's a pudgy old bag,
ex-hoofer, veteran chorine,
yearning to goose or grope tall, short, young or any-old, men.
At forty, she's had it, slow to go, can't quit the scene,
still aching for dressing-room noise,
one-night-stands, divine chorus-boys.
Bud, her darling, dares destiny's choice:
Baseball? No. Tap? No. Classic-ballet! He's put down, a fag.

She twirled on 'till she managed to manacle Joe,–
engineer with a curt career
ran off his rails. Stroke. Bud, the kid, a spry sprig at ten,
(Joe's sole sprout), faced two further fathers to fear,
a brace of brutes she would find fun.
Half-orphaned, a sly foster-son
sniffed two horny males he must shun,–
Doreen, his ideal; dancing, his dream: tip-top, tappy-toe.

Ray, (Dad No. 2) falls on two brats at life's school. Their play,
"Doctor",–a game. Nymphet next door,
under her porch peeps at privately publicized parts.
Ray paddles the pair. She weeps pints. Bud's butt stays sore
a week from the caning he caught.
Ray cools off but Buddy stays hot
for babes and ballet. Doreen's forgot
kids grow, up. He's sweet, but no child jives it like Ray.

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Ray's old jeep spills his skull on a skid. Enter Roy,
her third. He growls: "No *man* can DANCE!"
Bud hides his vice with athletic stealth. Performing Arts,
ball-game or ballet, blaze on skilled elegance.
Doreen's fire melts Roy by degrees,
down-draining him plumb to his lees,–
a wino. So-long, Roy. Now she's
scared she's been deserted since a Good Lord inserts Buddy Boy

in an army. He's drafted. No call to sham queer.
Dances! Despite Inspections, sweats
through rifle-range, K.P., shit-details. His secret P.T.,
(Physical-Training) is *barre*-work (by night). Gets
iron ankles, steel thews, rubber heels.
After each clandestine stint feels
great! To brothers-in-arms reveals
his strange aim. Some blink but absolve a straight musketeer.

Discharged, grown, up. Doreen still needs men. "Son, I'm so weak!"
Yup. Joe, Ray, Roy. Gone. So here's Bud.
And so BIG! Hooked on early habit they agree to agree:
twin-beds, hot-plate, tiny john; lease signed in blood.
Room-mates? Sorta. Clamped to one purse,
TV-package-dinners; a lot worse,
close-contact's calamitous curse:
nag. Peck. Fuss. Home-sweet-home, crowded, comfortless. Bleak.

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For life long lost she still lusts: twirly-whirl, tippy-tap.
Classic-ballet holds Buddy tight
tempering tendons 10-fold, the Dance his supernal state;
Doreen, nightmare and nurse. A classmates' delight
he hurls girls with his easy slick
firm potent toss, no simple trick,—
sky-high. Mother says she feels sick:
"I'm *not* jealous, Bud, only not very well . . ." Pure crap,

sprung from "cellular-science," a spiritual aid,
emetic, distasteful diet:
bean-curd, liquid-protein, glucose. Is she room-mate,
mistress or wife? Name it. Buddy won't buy it.
So she swoons to fix him by fright.
Outraged, he strides into wet night,
back by dawn, drenched. "Oh Christ, alright,
Mom. You win . . ." Until next time, tomorrow, waylaid

by drastic pretense. Her heart? Her what? God, alone, knows.
"Don't leave me alone . . ." Her big-act.
Alone? Joe, Ray, Roy. Bud. Sighs, sobs, suicide-hints.
Bud, with Doctor (aside), attends to fierce fact:
"Son, that woman's strong as a horse.
You two sorta need a divorce."
Glutton desire minds no remorse.
Boy, you choose. Your guts, her greed. Your balls, her need. Who owes

what to whom? Mirrors blaze evidence: "I'm so *right*!"
beams a changeling unchained. His glass
a dance-doubling lens, glares sovereign truth. Yon pert prince,
a dancer adroit, romps. It's all come to pass.
His virtuosic tradition,
hours locked to 5th-position
are served by selfless submission.
Swift metrical motion ignites footlight and spotlight.

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Dance promotes counterpoint. *Grand-jetés* float him free
of flat floors. He banks on his *barre*,
his turn-out is trim. Suave *pliés* launch sky-rocket jumps.
His prance is the pounce of a twinkle-toed star.
High-style, finesse, genial charm,
nice smile, nimble limb, strong forearm
dim any shy partner's alarm.
Ballerinas fly and glide, hoisted by mastery.

Stern practice whittled his sprints. Perfection's a thirst;
good dancers fuse fire in girt loins,
duets their true test. As cavalier, grace deals him trumps.
Conscious craft is uncoiled as he crisply coins
speed from space. This victor, apt, proud,
pleases both Press and the Big-Crowd.
Applause! Curtain-calls! Cheers! Bud's wowed
his world,–elastic, electric. Very well rehearsed.

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Buttons

This 50-ish frump, rat's-nest brittle hair
frittered by stress;
scalp daily raked to amend one last damsel flare
of auburn tress,
dredges her glazed phiz for a lost lass whose vestal stare
frays on loneliness.

Her sphere is her father's,– PAPA,– long-gone,
ever admired,
by whom all males must be scaled,– each sinning son,–
most, those desired.
Her trifling joys, false fear, few friends; ungraced, alone
and little required,–

save a good address, port wine, a change of frocks,
PAPA's old comb;
his twin decanters secured by locks:
limbo, but *home*,
immune from storm, rapine, turmoil. Delight shocks
misery's monochrome.

Dangles, near her steel-door, the elevator;
its midget cell
manned. She'd only dwell where a strong operator
obeyed her bell.
Rash intruder, beware! Ruffian, sex-fiend, predator:
JOE stands sentinel.

JOSÉ, elevator-boy, dear handyman,–
feline; polite;
26, 4 kids; East Harlem Porto-Rican.
JOE's on, all night.
August heat; outa-whack a vintage electric fan.
Her room is "a sight".

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So is she. A stained torn crimson kimono
loops spongy waist.
JOSÉ sighs: "*Pobra vieja*! Mahn! She no-for-Joe!"
Furtive distaste
fixes her fan; (nothing wrong). JOE's manners won't show
flirtation or haste.

His breast brags brilliant brass gleaming vibrant sexiness
which she should shun.
Button up! She X-rays a bronze chest in undress
tanned by hot sun,–
kitten eye-lashes, moustache. Ah, dare she caress
1 button, undone?

Men. Animals all. All naughty-boys, (darlings, too),
which includes JOE,
cute, sweaty, soft-spoken– and one of the few
exceptions, so
she twists a brass button on a macho tabu
cocoa mulatto.

Faultless in faith to a fierce ghostly Father,
now deceived, dead,
she fondles JOE's bobble. Buttons he's found a bother,
opts for, instead,
quick zippers which oft-times may foul, tho they're rather
faster to shed.

Contact! She's did it! Hey, JOE! You'd better look out!
Gorged veins surge in
loins where forebearance pumps up despair.
Dirty dreams merge in
fever. JOE merits reproof. He's no Boy Scout.
A mature virgin

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screams: "Take your *hands* off! You beast!" Love's capsized
ache.
Raw nightmares haunt
glimmers of rape. He's refused: ("Fer Chrize-sake,
whadja she *want*?")
Want? She wants you, JOE. She might say: "JOE, let's
make
woo, JOE!" But she can't.

JOSÉ, maleness mocked, fast flees past her chained door.
Ill-starred urchin,
stammers unluck: "JOE; he's sorreee. *Pardon*, *por favor* . . ."
Hurt, masculine,
he shambles adieu to a starved bankrupt whore
of a might-have-been.

Buz. Buzz. Buzzzz. Buttons below. Some furious son,
relentlessly,
insists to be served. 4 floors in crossed unison
buzzzz loud, off-key.
JOE, maybe lost, hopes his job isn't gone.
Praise landlord's mercy.

She, safe & sound, locked tight, hears his gates slam.
Her hair aswirl,
drains DADDY's decanters. Soon, she won't give a damn.
Unkind furies curl
in her mirror,–PAPA, JOE; honor: "Oh, my! Am
I *that* sorta girl?"

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seulement de cinq ouvertures : une fente pour la bouche, deux petits orifices ronds pour les narines et deux trous ovales, plus larges, pour les yeux.

Sans s'arrêter à ces détails, qu'il remarque à peine à cause de sa myopie, et rassuré en tout cas par la haute taille et la forte carrure du personnage, le serrurier [redacted]-ci, tout en répétant avec obs[redacted], jusqu'à la maison qu'il retrouve sans peine, puisque sa bicyclette et sa boîte à outils sont restées devant. Là il a vite fait de crocheter le mécanisme et d'ouvrir la porte en fausse chêne à la ferronnerie passée de mode. Il se retrouve donc dans le vestibule mal éclairé, prudemment caché derrière Brown qui commence, lui, à deviner ce dont il s'agit. Mais le petit homme chauve ne voit plus rien, au fond du couloir, de la scène inquiétante qu'il vient d'observer par le trou de la serrure. Il met assez longtemps à comprendre que le chirurgien en blouse blanche et la jeune patiente inanimée qui gît devant lui, sous le cône de lumière crue, sont en réalité placés beaucoup plus loin qu'il ne l'imaginait à l'instant. Sa myopie lui joue souvent de ces tours : c'est dans la glace qu'il regardait la scène, celle-ci se déroulant de l'autre côté du couloir, au fond de la bibliothèque dont la porte est comme d'habitude restée ouverte.

Mais à présent il est gêné par la silhouette massive de Brown qui a découvert tout de suite où se situait l'action et dont le costume noir, immobile, occupe presque toute l'embrasure. Le petit homme est contraint de se pencher encore, pour regarder par l'interstice laissé libre entre la chambranle et la taille cintrée de la veste du smoking. Etranger à

An Alain Robbe-Grillet manuscript page.

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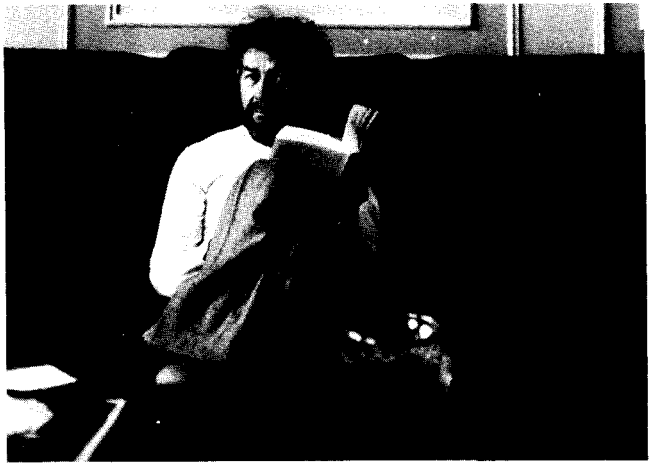

Photo: © Catherine Robbe-Grillet

The Art of Fiction XCI
Alain Robbe-Grillet

When in Paris, Alain Robbe-Grillet lives in a third-floor apartment in an affluent residential area on the edge of the city, across the street from the woods of the Bois de Boulogne. You cross two courtyards to reach his building, where the spacious sitting-room overlooks flower-beds and pots. It is extremely tranquil, furnished simply, with black and red the predominant colors, plenty of comfortable sofas and chairs, and piles of books everywhere. Robbe-Grillet comes to Paris for business (he is director of the publishing firm Les Editions de Minuit, *his own publishers) and to see friends, but he writes in his large country house in Normandy, where he spends as much time as he can.*

Alain Robbe-Grillet's first two novels, The Erasers *(1953) and* The Voyeur *(1955), were ignored by the public and dismissed by the critics. But his third and most famous novel,* Jealousy *(1957),*

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was enthusiastically reviewed by Roland Barthes—already one of the most serious and influential voices in Parisian literary circles—who called it "objective," giving the word Littré *dictionary's definition as "turned toward the object." From then on, the word was used to designate a group of novelists working along the same lines: Michel Butor, Claude Ollier, Claude Simon, Robert Pinget, and Nathalie Sarraute. Though varied in age, personality, and style, they shared certain preoccupations, chiefly a questioning of the old and the search for a new form of* récit*—narrative. In a series of essays published in the* L'Express *magazine and later in a book entitled* For A New Novel *(1963), Robbe-Grillet outlined the ideas and methods of the New Novelists; he became the spokesman of the movement. With the international success of Alain Resnais's film* Last Year at Marienbad, *for which he wrote the script, Robbe-Grillet's reputation increased, and his books began to sell. He made his own films and wrote many more novels in the years that followed, becoming a favorite on American campuses. He now spends one term every year at an American university.*

At the beginning of 1985, Robbe-Grillet's autobiography, The Mirror That Returns, *appeared amid publicity and controversy, becoming an instant bestseller. That the spokesman of the "objective novel" should indulge in an eminently subjective exercise, an autobiography, seemed a provocation. Yet the book is vintage Robbe-Grillet, characteristically mixing fact and fiction, memory and imagination.*

INTERVIEWER

You have just published your autobiography, *The Mirror That Returns*. Are you pleased with the response?

ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET

It has been received better than any of my other books, in the sense that it has become a bestseller. Usually my books are longsellers, that is to say they sell in much greater numbers than many a bestseller, but over a long period. The impact of this one has been immediate. As a result I have trouble assessing its reception because the reviews are full of contradictions. Some

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people have liked the autobiographical side, the description of family life. Some have appreciated the new way of speaking about the German occupation—the relationship of the French people with the occupiers—simply and without make-up. My parents were Germanophile. Well, they *were* Germanophile—so what? I don't hide it. I don't try to justify or condemn it—I tell the story. And this had never been done before.

INTERVIEWER

Some people like the theory of literature contained in the book above all.

ROBBE-GRILLET

Indeed! Which is the continuation of what is in my novels and my theoretical works. None of these points is indifferent to me, at the same time none *really* interests me. What *does* interest me is the weaving of all these different elements in the book; the way they mix in movement, constantly shifting and changing, as if they were fragments of me. When I think of myself, I feel that I am made up of fragments in which there are childhood memories, fictional characters I particularly care about—such as Henri de Corinth—and even characters who belong to literature and with whom I feel I have family ties. Stavrogin of *The Possessed* and Madame Bovary are related to me exactly as my grandfather is, or my aunt. So it is the way all these figures move and refuse to be fixed that excites me. Well, at least that is what I say today. Another day I might say something different!

INTERVIEWER

Henri de Corinth appears in several of your novels and now in your autobiography, where he is a family friend. Is he based on someone you knew?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I almost think that I have known him in real life; at the same time I can believe that my grandfather is someone I have invented. All these characters, whether real or imagined, make

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up the content of my imaginary world. It doesn't matter which has been born of experience and which belongs to the imagination. I would be sad if I had to differentiate—I don't live like that. But I can tell you how I arrived at his name. Goethe has a ballad called *The Fiancée of Corinth.* It is based on a famous Greek legend in which a man falls in love with a very beautiful, pale, slim girl; but he can't get close to her. "You must first ask my father's permission," she says. So he travels to Corinth, her home town, finds her house and knocks on the door. But the girl's mother informs him that their daughter has died many years ago. However, it is a dark, cold night and they give him shelter, putting him in their daughter's room. During the night the girl comes and lies beside him and sucks his blood. In the morning he is found dead, with a wound on his neck. This ballad of Goethe's is used by Michelet in his novel *The Witch*, in which a chapter is called "La Fiancée de Corinth". There is an ambiguity here: "the fiancée of Corinth" could mean either that the girl comes from Corinth or that she is Corinth's fiancée. My character, Henri de Corinth, is born out of this ambiguity. I have often said that my memories tend to become engravings, say by Honoré Daumier. I see with precision a scene I am trying to depict, and at the same time I see an engraving: a room with a large Napoleon III bed, and a young woman leaning over a child. Now in *The Mirror That Returns* I write, "My mother often watched over my troubled sleep with a paraffin lamp." I am certain that a novelist is someone who attributes a different reality-value to the characters and events of his story than to those of "real" life. A novelist is someone who confuses his own life with that of his characters.

INTERVIEWER

Do you mean that memory is imagination, that we invent our own life in retrospect or indeed as we go along?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Exactly. Memory belongs to the imagination. Human memory is not like a computer which records things; it is part of the imaginative process, on the same terms as invention. In other

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words, inventing a character or recalling a memory is part of the same process. This is very clear in Proust: for him there is no difference between lived experience—his relationship with his mother, and so forth—and his characters. Exactly the same type of truth is involved.

INTERVIEWER

There is a very moving scene in *The Mirror* which illustrates your point: Henri de Corinth rides in the sea and nearly drowns in order to capture a mirror which is floating on the water and which recedes as he advances. It is a story within the story, what André Gide called *mise-en-abime.* Did you deliberately choose this method?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I never choose anything deliberately. I make references to all sorts of things—for example, to a novel by the Persian writer Sadegh Hedayat, *The Blind Owl.* It seems an opposition to the Cartesian spirit; yet Descartes wrote, "If I dream of something with enough power, when I wake up I don't know whether it was a dream or reality." So you see, Descartes confers the same truth-status to a dream, if he has dreamed with enough power to turn it to reality.

INTERVIEWER

But surely this is a far cry from your theories of the "New Novel," in which reality has to be depicted exactly, to its minutest detail?

ROBBE-GRILLET

It seems to be the opposite of what has been said about the New Novel in general and my work in particular. But I have been protesting against the idea of "objectivity" for thirty years. I have stated that I never describe something that exists in reality: I don't look at a landscape or an engraving and then describe it. There is an engraving in my novel *In the Labyrinth* called *The Defeat of Rischenfelt.* Everyone believes that I have had this engraving in my hand. But never! Everything in my novels

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is pure invention. It may be seen with the precision of something that is there, in front of my eyes, but it never is! If it were, I would not wish to describe it. It is in my brain and not in front of my eyes. During the first years of my work people always wrote, "Robbe-Grillet means objectivity, the scientific eye." Perhaps, but the scientific eye is looking at what is in the imagination.

INTERVIEWER

If you have something in mind that you wish to describe, it means that you have something to say. Yet you have argued vigorously against the idea that a writer ever has, or should have, anything to say.

ROBBE-GRILLET

When a novelist has "something to say," they mean a message. It has political connotations, or a religious message, or a moral prescription. It means "commitment," as used by Sartre and other fellow-travelers. They are saying that the writer has a world view, a sort of truth that he wishes to communicate, and that his writing has an ulterior significance. I am against this. Flaubert described a whole world, but he had nothing to *say*, in the sense that he had no message to transmit, no remedy to offer for the human condition.

INTERVIEWER

But did Dostoyevsky have nothing to say? Tolstoy?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Tolstoy yes. That is why on the whole he doesn't interest me.

INTERVIEWER

Not even Anna Karenina?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Especially not Anna Karenina! Among Tolstoy's books the one that interests me is *The Death of Ivan Ilych.* Ivan is someone who hurts himself while unhooking a curtain, and one sees

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his death in that gesture. As for Dostoyevsky, perhaps there is a message in his work but for me it is a kind of parasite. In *Crime And Punishment*, I am much more interested in the first part which is the preparation for the murder. You remember the scene where Raskolnikov is getting the axe ready? And he is fascinated by the act he has to accomplish? The last part of the book, about guilt and moral responsibility and so on, bores me profoundly.

INTERVIEWER

Because you, or your characters, never feel moral responsibility or guilt?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Never!

INTERVIEWER

Aren't you lucky!

ROBBE-GRILLET

Perhaps. The book of Dostoyevsky's that interests me most is *The Possessed*. It is an enigmatic novel; the main protagonist is an enigma. I read it over and over again and find it tremendous—it has a concept of reality that escapes "significance." That may be my reading of it; someone else might apprehend it differently. I am sure Camus would have said something quite different about it.

INTERVIEWER

Another writer who has had a great influence on you is Kafka. He is someone who has been interpreted in more than one way. What is his fascination for you?

ROBBE-GRILLET

He has been read as having a metaphysical and religious message—the relationship between the Jew and his God. This is the influence of Max Brod, his friend and first biographer. It doesn't interest me in the least. I read Kafka as the revelation

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of a world, which is much more important than yet another meditation on the Talmud. Brod's reading of Kafka is reductive and restrictive, as if his work could be reduced to metaphysical relations. What I find extraordinary is the actual presence of this opaque world.

INTERVIEWER

While we are on the subject of your influences, Flaubert seems to have had the strongest impact on you, and indeed he could be considered the father of the New Novel in general. At the moment he is enjoying a tremendous vogue—in England for example, where he is the most fashionable French author. Do you think it is partly because of the cool—not to say cold—eye he casts on the world, his somewhat cynical and detached relationship to his characters, which is seductive to the modern, analytical mind?

ROBBE-GRILLET

That is what some critics say. But of course, it isn't true at all. This myth of Flaubert's coldness and cynicism is incomprehensible to me. I read him as a warm, affectionate and generous novelist. He has, for all his characters, a kind of warm friendship, which is the same for Emma Bovary as for her unattractive husband, or even for the pharmacist Homais. One feels that he is not staying outside, but has tenderness and pity, and of course sometimes condemnation, for his characters. He *is* Charles Bovary, and Emma, and Homais. I find his warmth superior to Balzac's, who speaks about warmth all the time but who is, for me, an icy writer.

INTERVIEWER

Poor Balzac! He is out of favor at the moment and everyone seems to have it in for him.

ROBBE-GRILLET

God be praised!

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INTERVIEWER

Yet in his essays on Balzac and the novel, the Hungarian critic Georg Lukacs insists that Balzac is superior to Flaubert and *a fortiori* to Zola and other naturalists. He says that when Zola wants to write about an auditorium, he goes to the theater every night, looks around and takes notes, then describes minutely all he has seen. While Balzac may never set foot in the theater, but his description is more *real* than Zola's because it comes from the imagination. This tallies with what you were saying earlier about your own approach, which is to describe what is in the head rather than in front of the eye.

ROBBE-GRILLET

What troubles me about Lukacs is his insensitivity to literature. For him, Zola and Flaubert are the same thing, both naturalists! Actually, they're complete opposites. In Flaubert everything lives *in the text*; it is the text itself which is in the process of living, whereas Zola is a naturalist who describes the world and its minutiae. To put Zola and Flaubert in the same bag is to be completely insensitive to the text. I'll give you another example of Lukacs's misreading: when he presents Balzac as the Great Revolutionary Novelist, it is because he believes that Balzac's work is a denunciation of nascent capitalism and the fragmentation it will bring about—the fragmentation of work, conscience, family life, etc. So he makes Balzac a sort of precursor of capitalist alienation. Now for me, Balzac denounces nothing at all; on the contrary, he creates a perfectly reassuring universe which is by no means a fragmented one. There is no *béance*, none of these gaps, as in Flaubert, where the text is a world and not a description of a world. In Balzac—and this has been said by some American critics like Leo Bersani of Berkeley—there is a discrepancy, a hiatus between the denunciation of fragmentation and a text which is the exact opposite: coherent and even compact to the point of reassurance and comfort. It is not an accident that he has become the great novelist of the bourgeoisie. Precisely all his ration-

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alist ideas about the world's functioning are the same as those held by the middle-classes of his time. He says that there is room for improvement in the organization of the world, but that man's relationship to the world is basically fixed. There is never a gap, nor the slightest room for anxiety.

INTERVIEWER

This may be true of his most famous novels, like *Le Père Goriot*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *La Cousine Bette* . . . But in certain marginal works, such as *Séraphita* or *Sarrasine* you find the Flaubertian "gap."

ROBBE-GRILLET

Ah, but those are not the novels that are taught in schools! In Flaubert's novels no revolutionary ideas are propounded, yet his entire work is an appeal to question the world through the cracks in the space/time continuity, and particularly in the continuity of the causal chain. For example, at the end of *Sentimental Education*, in the last phase of the Revolution of 1848, a member of the National Guard kills Dussardier with his sword, and the text reads: "The guardsman drew a circle in the crowd with his gaze and Frédéric, gaping, recognized Sénécal." Gaping! Then there is a blank space on the page, and the narrative continues with: "He traveled. He experienced the melancholy of boats, the cold dawns beneath the tent, . . . the bitterness of interrupted friendships." In that second when Sénécal looks at the crowd, we have ten years of Frédéric's life in one paragraph: "*La mélancholie des paquebots*" etc. And that is Flaubert's life. And it happens in the text. It is profoundly moving, and it is precisely what makes Flaubert a revolutionary writer. Lukacs doesn't see it. I mean he doesn't see the way it is made.

INTERVIEWER

When you say "the way it is made," or put together, could it not have been done just as well without evoking Frédéric's inner world? I mean was it not because Flaubert had "something to say," namely, to tell Frédéric's life, that he made it that way?

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ROBBE-GRILLET

It is not a question of evoking, but of *piercing* the world. Suddenly a fundamental meaninglessness appears in the world. One is in the middle of a failed revolution in which the principal characters are involved, and one becomes aware that something much more serious is happening—namely, the world is not a sensible continuity that can be comprehensively explained, but a perpetual aspiration to sense, perpetually disappointed. It is human existence that has to create sense at every instant. Not to describe a sense that already exists, but to create a sense that doesn't exist yet. "The melancholy of boats, the cold dawns under a tent," etc., are stereotypes of travel. What is interesting is that it happens *there*, and suddenly digs a hole in Frédéric's life, in Flaubert's life, and in the Revolution of 1848.

INTERVIEWER

Are you attempting the same thing in *Jealousy*, where the tropical stereotypes – luxuriant vegetation, heat, create an atmosphere of tension and anxiety?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Yes. But I create it through the text, not by what is in the text. In fact you are right—there *is* atmosphere of anxiety. It is interesting what you point out about *Jealousy*, because it is the book of mine which has been described as the most dehumanized, where nothing happens; a serene, whitewashed world in which man seems perfectly reconciled with his environment. Yet it is exactly the opposite: it is an experiment with anxiety. The anxiety which Heidegger believes man must experience as the price of spiritual freedom. And that is the price Balzac does not want to pay, and that Flaubert pays at every moment.

INTERVIEWER

What about Stendhal? He must be even less fashionable than Balzac since he is not even discussed! Yet he seems to me the most authentic French Romantic novelist, and he is closer to Flaubert than to Balzac, especially *The Charterhouse of Parma.*

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Fabrice del Dongo has the same vacillation in the battle of Waterloo as Frédéric has in the Revolution of 1848.

ROBBE-GRILLET

Quite so. There are passages in Stendhal which are highly important, such as all the first part of *The Charterhouse*, and the battle of Waterloo where the world begins to rock, when Fabrice leaves to join Napoleon without knowing what he is doing. He speaks with a foreign accent which is liable to brand him as a spy; he is put in prison, escapes, buys a horse, participates in battles he does not understand, then spends the rest of his life wondering whether he has *really* been to war. It is wonderful! Perfectly enigmatic since he does not know whether he has lived the experience or simply dreamt it. It is blurred. But I don't know Stendhal well. I read him a lot when I was young but feel that he did not leave a permanent impression. As for fashion, well, among the intellectuals Flaubert is now in vogue, but thirty years ago, when I started talking about him, Stendhal was the *auteur-à-succès*. For example, the New Wave in cinema claimed him as a mentor, while academics preferred Balzac. Today it is Flaubert's turn, which is fine by me since it is the triumph of my own views.

INTERVIEWER

This brings us to your theoretical work and its influence. When you published *For A New Novel,* a collection of articles published in the *L'Express* over a decade, it became a kind of manifesto of the New Novel. And you became the spokesman of the movement. Have you changed any of your positions?

ROBBE-GRILLET

No, I haven't, but I feel that the book has been read in a bizarre way. The other day a journalist told me that I was vindicating subjectivity by publishing an autobiography, and that this meant a radical change from my previous position. So I fetched *For a New Novel* and opened it at a passage I knew well, and there, in the middle of the page, was written, "The New Novel aims only at total subjectivity." Now why had he

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not read it? On the contrary, the book was read as a manifesto of objectivity, while in every page I denounce the idea of its possibility.

INTERVIEWER

Was it because of Barthes? In his review of *The Erasers*, which launched you, he wrote about "objective literature," preceding it with a definition from the *Littré* dictionary: "Objective means turned toward the object." Do you think everyone followed Barthes in his assessment?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Barthes, and then Maurice Blanchot. They presented two totally different Robbe-Grillets. Blanchot's was a fantastic who was interested in a world at the limit of visibility. Barthes's was exactly the opposite—anchored in reality, speaking of the object. It is the latter Robbe-Grillet who was "launched," as you say. Barthes was a very sly author who has been read in a simplistic way. When he uses the word "objective," he does not mean impartial or neutral. In a microscope there are two lenses, one turned toward the eye and another toward the object; that is what Barthes means by "objective." Or says that I mean! Now, reading the *Mirror*, they say I have changed. Those who like and understand my work realize that the *Mirror* is a step in the same direction. Others have liked it *because* it betrays me!

INTERVIEWER

There is a third category: those who, like Jean-Paul Aron, author of *Les Modernes*, maintain that Robbe-Grillet has never had any significance. Yet they like the *Mirror* because it has "meaning."

ROBBE-GRILLET

Aron's is a spiteful book. He wanted to be Michel Foucault and failed, so he is angry.

INTERVIEWER

Foucault did write about you in the sixties, in the magazine

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Tel Quel. He said that the whole modern movement in France originated in you. Yet Nathalie Sarraute had published her first book, *Tropisms*, as early as 1938, which would make it the start of the New Novel.

ROBBE-GRILLET

The New Novel is vast, and the aims of the New Novelists are varied. It was Sarraute who started the denunciation of "character" in the Balzacian sense, and tried to find the inner impulses of the hero at the moment he endeavors to express himself. What she calls "tropisms" are the tiny imperceptible interactions between people—the little games of aggression and retreat, the miniscule battles which constitute the present state of the psyche. Marguerite Duras, whom I consider a New Novelist although she does not agree, wrote her first books, such as the popular *Dam on The Pacific*, in a conventional way. She changed direction with *Modérato Cantabile.* Claude Simon's early novels, before *The Wind*, were also conventional. But the New Novel encouraged these authors to go to the end of their own conception of the novel, to forget about pleasing publishers and critics, and trust their own personalities and fantasies. So these three had written before me but I hadn't read them. But when Foucault said that I was the father of modernity, he meant the modernity which led to *Tel Quel.* I met him when he was a cultural attaché in Hamburg and not yet a writer. I introduced him to Husserl and to a number of other things which he later wrote about. Eventually he lost interest in literature and became interested in social phenomena, such as sexuality and prisons.

INTERVIEWER

Michel Butor is a contemporary of yours, and it's a strange coincidence that although you had not read each other, you had both taken the same direction—one which was not yet formulated theoretically.

ROBBE-GRILLET

The New Novel has always been a very heterogenous move-

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ment. Everyone follows their own direction, but what has happened is that we've often had the same progenitors. For Butor and me, Joyce's *Ulysses* is a seminal work in our development. It is interesting to note that in the constellation of our "parents"—Kafka, Faulkner, Joyce—there are very few French names. There is Proust, of course, and in some ways Camus and Sartre.

INTERVIEWER

Joyce attacks language itself: syntax, vocabulary, and phrasing are all turned upside down. Whereas your language is very pure, not to say purified; it is almost a return to Madame de Lafayette and the limpid simplicity of the seventeenth-century prose.

ROBBE-GRILLET

Exactly. Those I call the New Novelists have not, on the whole, attacked the structure of the language, and certainly not the vocabulary. Simon has sometimes tampered with syntax, but not much. As for me, the language has remained pure. The result is that *Jealousy*, which was deemed unreadable by critics at the time of its publication, became a part of the school curriculum very rapidly, alongside Camus's *The Stranger* and St. Exupery's *Night Flight*, because the language is perfectly correct. But I would like to emphasize the element of variety again. Although everyone followed their own way, the whole movement was supported by a publisher who was willing to produce and spread a literature which was the opposite of what the critics liked—namely, Les Éditions de Minuit. Even Duras, who was published by Gallimard, switched to Minuit with *Modérato Cantabile.*

INTERVIEWER

Minuit was established by Vercors during the Second World War and published Resistance writers. When did they change direction?

ROBBE-GRILLET

In the fifties. During the War they were above all political

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publishers. Afterwards, Vercors lost his influence and it became a literary firm. Georges Lambrichs, who became the Managing Director, signed Michel Butor and myself, and published my first novel, *The Erasers*, in 1953. Later Jérome Lindon took over from Lambrichs and invited me to join the firm as literary adviser, which I did. I was very active in the fifties and sixties in that capacity, but since the seventies I have not had much time, as I travel a good deal and generally have too much to do. In the fifties the new literary movement—later called the New Novel—began to take shape in a series of weekly meetings at Lindon's house on the Boulevard Arago. It consisted of a very large and varied group of writers who all had the same aim: to denounce the false neutrality of the critics in power. At the time, the critics who wielded real power were not Barthes, Blanchot, Georges Bataille, and Marthe Robert, but reactionary academics like Emile Henriot, Roger Kempf, Robert Canterce, Henri Cloy, et al., who wrote in influential newspapers such as *Figaro* and *Le Monde*, and who resolutely opposed any innovation in literature.

INTERVIEWER

Was it not Emile Henriot who first coined the expression New Novel?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I believe it was. He condemned Sarraute's *Tropisms* – written before the War and reprinted in the fifties—and *The Voyeur*. Now, Sarraute's work is very different from mine, but he condemned them both in the name of Balzacian laws. So we had the idea of forming a group to analyze the analyses of the critics. That is to say, to analyze their vocabulary. We even intended to make up a dictionary of their language—a project which didn't materialize but provided a good deal of amusement. We started to demonstrate that their words did not belong to literature but simply constituted an ideology—their ideology.

INTERVIEWER

Going back to the beginning of the movement, you said that

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Barthes's patronage of your work was adopted rather than Blanchot's. One aspect of Blanchot's reading of your work makes you a kind of precursor of what is called Fantastic Realism—novels such as Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and a score of others, mostly Latin American writers.

ROBBE-GRILLET

Perhaps. But I am not interested in Márquez. For me, the great South American writer is Guillermo Cabrera Infante. But he is not much spoken of these days because he is no longer on the Left and the Left still holds sway. Yet politically he is much more honorable than Márquez whose career is based on a kind of Leftism which is in fact Stalinist. I can't bear all this communist chic! Neruda, Márquez, etc. . . At any rate, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is like Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*—an exception.

INTERVIEWER

The fantastic element in your work—for example the whole episode of Henri de Corinth—is not insisted upon but blurred; it vacillates, as in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, where the magic is not indicated but intimated.

ROBBE-GRILLET

That I accept. I have long admired and enjoyed certain novels of Henry James's, especially *The Turn of The Screw.* But the writer who influenced me even more, in the same sense, is Kipling, especially the Indian short stories: "The Phantom Rickshaw," "Forty-Two Degrees, in the Shade," "The Lost Legion." The relationship of officers with ghosts.

INTERVIEWER

In your autobiography you mention Kipling as a very early influence, and also Lewis Carroll and other English children's books, which you read in translation. Who were the authors you read as an adult who influenced your work? You mentioned Camus as a great influence. How do you assess him now?

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ROBBE-GRILLET

The two most influential books of the war years were Sartre's *Nausea* and Camus's *The Stranger.* Other novels by the same authors—for example Sartre's *The Roads to Liberty* or Camus's *The Fall*—are of little interest. I feel that I decided to become a writer when I read *The Stranger*, which appeared in 1942, during the Occupation. It was published by Gallimard, a firm very much connected with the Occupiers. By the way, Sartre himself finally confessed that the Occupation hadn't bothered him much. But my reading of *The Stranger*, as I explain in the *Mirror*, is very personal. The murder committed by Mersault was the *result* of a situation, which is the situation of relationship to the world.

INTERVIEWER

Reading *The Stranger* gave you the desire to become a writer. Yet you went to University to study agronomy and became an engineer. Why?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I have always been interested in living things, plants, animals, and I was happy working as an agronomist for ten years.

INTERVIEWER

When did you decide to give up your job and devote yourself entirely to writing?

ROBBE-GRILLET

At the beginning of the fifties. I had no financial resources at all, and I lived in a garret. That is when I met Catherine. I had written a couple of books which no one wanted to publish, and later no one wanted to read. So she rightly refused to marry me. A husband is someone with a job, capable of supporting his wife and children. I felt condemned to obscurity and to celibacy. But when one is driven by a passion, one can live on almost nothing, and I was driven by passion for writing. One does not starve in modern, Western societies, and one can

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do without such amenities as the telephone, a car, entertainment. I lived in nine square meters for ten years. Then I was given this apartment by Jean Paulhan, so things began to look up; Catherine had consented to marry me on the condition that I find somewhere to live.

INTERVIEWER

Did things improve with *Jealousy*?

ROBBE-GRILLET

No, *Jealousy* was much later, in 1957. It sold 500 copies in one year. You can imagine what that meant by way of royalties! It belongs to a period when I still had no readers.

INTERVIEWER

Readers began to come with the success of *Last Year at Marienbad*, didn't they? Did Alain Resnais ask you to write the script for his film, or did you intend to enter the film world anyway?

ROBBE-GRILLET

It was Resnais's producer. After *Jealousy* I wrote *The Labyrinth* which sold a few more copies. Resnais's producer asked me to write a script for him. Resnais himself wanted to make a film with Françoise Sagan, so he was not interested, but the producer said perhaps I could persuade him. I immediately wrote three synopses, two pages each, and handed them over to Resnais. He liked them and said, "go ahead." It didn't cost him anything since the producer had agreed to pay me without any commitment on Resnais's part. I produced not a scenario but a finished script: shot by shot, frame by frame, with all the camera movements, and ready to shoot. It is rare that a director would accept such a script, but Resnais did, and the film was done in two months.

INTERVIEWER

Was *Marienbad* your first attempt at scriptwriting?

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ROBBE-GRILLET

No. *The Immortal One* was my first script. In 1960, a producer asked me if I wanted to make a film of my own. I said, "Yes, but I don't have a large readership as a writer." He said, "Never mind—you are fashionable." The only condition was that the film be shot in Istanbul. "Why?" I asked. It was a dark story—as it always is in the film industry—about some Belgian money locked up in Turkey to be used on an exportable product. It so happened that I had met Catherine in Istanbul; therefore the city was part of my own imaginary world. I accepted immediately and left for Turkey where I wrote the script. Then came the revolution against Menderes and the country was plunged into bloodshed. As a result the film didn't happen. When Resnais was shooting *Marienbad* I went back to Istanbul to negotiate with the new Turkish government. I made *The Immortal* myself a year later. The joke is that no one wanted to buy *Marienbad*! The producer decided that the film would never be shown, that it insulted and mocked the public, that it meant nothing. I was in a particularly awkward position, since I was "the *bad* Alain Robbe-Grillet" who had corrupted "the *good* Alain Resnais." So for a year the film lay fallow. By chance, the Venice Film Festival saved it, and the absurd, idiotic film became a roaring success overnight.

INTERVIEWER

But it was for your own film, *The Immortal One*, that you won the Leduc Prize.

ROBBE-GRILLET

Despite the prize the film had no success at all. But the following film, *Trans-Europe Express*, did very well, and I could go on making other films, such as *The Man Who Lies*, and *Play With Fire*. I am planning another film—I can't talk about it for superstitious reasons—but I have no trouble finding the money since I can make films very cheaply, with tiny resources.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of the French New Wave directors? Those

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who came from *Les Cahiers du Cinema* and made films at the same time as you did? Did they influence you?

ROBBE-GRILLET

There is one director I admire enormously, and that is Jean-Luc Godard. Apart from his latest film, *Hail Mary*, all his output is important to me. But the really successful directors, like Truffaut and Chabrol, I consider completely insignificant. They make good traditional films, based on novels which worked very well before they were filmed, but they can't be compared with the formal inventiveness of Godard. Truffaut is famous as an avant-garde director, while he is the rear, rear guard! As for Eric Rohmer, he is the fellow who writes dialogues and then gets actors to speak them in front of the camera. Often the most successful film of a director is the least interesting: Truffaut's *The Last Metro* was a piece of commercial rubbish in all its horror, yet it was a big hit.

INTERVIEWER

What about other great names of the cinema: Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, and so on. . . . Who influenced you as a director?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Fritz Lang, Erich von Stroheim, Orson Welles—*The Lady of Shanghai* more than *Citizen Kane*. Bergman doesn't interest me at all.

INTERVIEWER

After *Marienbad* your success spread to America and the Americans took you to their generous bosoms. Why do you think they did and the English, to this day, have not?

ROBBE-GRILLET

The Americans and the English are two very different peoples, except for their language—though even there! The English are insular and turned towards America; they do not like the Continent and European culture. The Americans, on the contrary,

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are alert to what is happening in Europe. The English are wary of seriousness; the Americans are more earnest. They have accepted Derrida, Foucault, Barthes—all difficult thinkers. I was first introduced to Americans by Bruce Morissette, a university professor, and a specialist in fake Rimbauds. In 1955, he heard a radio discussion about *The Voyeur* and found it interesting. Since I was not translated into English and no one had heard of me, his interest was genuine, he was not trying to jump onto a bandwagon. Barney Rosset, who had published Beckett and was interested in the avant-garde, took *The Voyeur.* He and my British publisher, John Calder, have been very loyal and keep my books in circulation despite scant sales.

INTERVIEWER

Later the New Novel became fashionable and some university professors began to write the same sort of novels. You became a guest on American campuses . . .

ROBBE-GRILLET

Oh, much later. First, I was invited to a Modern Language Association congress in Chicago. It was after a plane crash in which we had survived and Catherine refused to travel by air or let me do it. So we crossed the Atlantic by boat and took the train from New York to Chicago. The lecture was a success and the Americans liked the way I spoke about literature. There are writers who hate speaking of their work—like Beckett—but I don't.

INTERVIEWER

Do you lecture on French authors only, or Americans too?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I often speak about William Faulkner, and Vladimir Nabokov whom I consider a great New Novelist. *Pale Fire* is a marvelous book. Among the American New Novelists, who are very different from their French counterparts, I like Robert Coover, Thomas Pynchon, and a few others. They are far less famous than Saul Bellow or William Styron who belong to the pre-

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Faulknerian era of American literature. They belong to the New York psychoanalytical, often Jewish, school. I am very friendly with some of them, Styron in particular, but their work doesn't excite me. Last year in Japan, Styron and I had a television dialogue. We spoke through interpreters, with earphones, and got on very well.

INTERVIEWER

Apart from your own theoretical work on the New Novel, have you been involved in the other currents of these last decades: structuralism, deconstructionism? The changing literary fashions in France?

ROBBE-GRILLET

The literary *haute-couture*! I was interested but not involved. There were exchanges between structuralism and the New Novel through Barthes, who was considered a structuralist.

INTERVIEWER

What about Jacques Lacan, who was very fashionable for a while? As Simone de Beauvoir said, one can never find anyone—not even a Lacanian—who can explain what he was all about. He seems to have given French intellectual movements a bad name.

ROBBE-GRILLET

I agree with you entirely as regards the last phase of his work, when his reputation was at its height—he really talked nonsense. By contrast I think that in the thirties and forties—at the beginning of psychoanalysis in France—he contributed something of importance to it. His first articles, such as "The Mirror Stage," were very interesting. He became boring as he became worldly. But the Freudian dogma is finished in France—no one takes it seriously.

INTERVIEWER

Speaking about worldliness, when you became famous, did you begin to frequent literary salons?

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ROBBE-GRILLET

It was the end of the era of salons in Paris. There were only two: La Comtesse de Fals's and Suzanne Pezenas's. The latter had done a great deal for Boulez. I only went to meet people I liked, such as Jean Paulhan.

INTERVIEWER

Earlier you mentioned *Nausea* as one of your early influences. Did you ever meet Sartre and his circle?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Oh yes. He was an extremely generous man in his personal relationships. He had a great desire to please, but he was not really interested in literature and art, although he could talk about them at length. Do you know Boris Vian's sentence which sums him up? "How can you not admire a man who is capable of saying anything about any subject!" Sartre became aware of the New Novel for strange reasons—because of the Algerian War. There was a manifesto written by Maurice Blanchot and signed by the New Novelists against the war, and Sartre asked, "Who are these people?" He then decided to make an effort and help us, but he never did. I remember that when *Marienbad* was a condemned film, there was a private screening for André Breton, and Sartre came too. But only because Resnais and I had signed the manifesto for an independent Algeria. He loved the film and said to me, "I will back you." But he did nothing. When the film finally got released he wrote a very generous review in the *Temps Modernes*. Alas, he was surrounded by horrible people—a petty, claustrophobic clique, against everything that was not connected with them. I remember another episode: after the Khrushchev Report against Stalin's crimes, there was a cultural *détente* and the Russians had invited a delegation of French intellectuals to Leningrad. I went with Nathalie Sarraute, Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir. It was a bizarre and awkward situation because of Simone de Beauvoir's personal hatred of Sarraute. She hated Sartre having intelligent female friends (though she didn't mind actresses and secretaries) and Sarraute, who was much more intelligent than she, was

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particularly abhorrent to her. Anyway, in Leningrad Sartre represented the Existentialist Novel and he said that after *Nausea* he had been wrong to write *The Roads to Freedom*, and that the real existentialist novel in which everything happens within the textual movement was the New Novel. I was very pleased because I had always maintained that I was heir to *Nausea*, yet I knew he was saying that only to please us. So you see, he was anxious to be generous.

INTERVIEWER

Some people might say that he was also very conscious of trends and afraid of missing out on the latest fashion.

ROBBE-GRILLET

And to please *everybody*! In Leningrad he gave a lecture — he had an astonishing facility with words — in which he explained that the existentialist novel, the New Novel, and Socialist Realism were all the same thing! We had been invited by a group of Stalinist swines, such as Ehrenburg and Fiedin, who had survived everything, and Sartre was defending their doctrine, just to please!

INTERVIEWER

Did you meet Anna Akhmatova when you were there, or any other dissidents?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I saw her once. We met writers who were not yet dissidents but became so later, like Aksenov.

INTERVIEWER

I would like to discuss certain recurrent themes in your work. For example, there are similarities between your books and detective novels. Is that a deliberate choice?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Do you know Borges's preface to Adolfo Bioy Casares's *The Invention of Morel*? In it, Borges maintains that all the great

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novels of the twentieth century are detective novels, and he mentions Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, Kafka's *The Castle*, and many others. Then he explains why. It seems that the structure of police investigation is very close to the technique of modern novels, in particular the nonresolved investigation, as in *The Castle*. The difference is that in the traditional detective novel there *must* be a solution, whereas in ours there is just the principle of investigation. Detective novels are consumer products, sold by millions, and are made in the following way: there are clues to an event, say a murder, and someone comes along and puts the the pieces together in order that truth may be revealed. Then it all makes sense. In our novels what is missing is "sense." There is a constant appeal to sense, but it remains unfulfilled, because the pieces keep moving and shifting and when "sense" appears it is transitory. Therefore, what is important is not to discover the truth at the end of the investigation, but the process itself.

INTERVIEWER

That is one aspect of your novels. Another one is the "mise-en-abime"—the use of the story-within-the-story. For example, in *The Voyeur* there is a poster which reproduces the rape scene in the novel.

ROBBE-GRILLET

Yes, I suppose in various forms I have used it. But I never used the expression myself. It was an American critic who mentioned it, quoting Gide.

INTERVIEWER

You often use cinematic techniques, such as the flashback, and the repetition of specific scenes. Does it come from your work as scriptwriter?

ROBBE-GRILLET

One can always find references to the cinema, even in books that were written before its advent. I have never consciously

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used cinematic techniques, and if cinema didn't exist you would not think of it when reading my novels.

INTERVIEWER

In *Marienbad*, and some of your other films, certain shots are repeated throughout. Is it a way of emphasizing a particular incident, or image?

ROBBE-GRILLET

No. It is the other way round; it is not because a scene is important that it is repeated, but by being repeated it becomes important. In general, nothing really important happens in my films—it is the *way* certain scenes recur. As I said, there is no "significance."

INTERVIEWER

So you keep saying! In *For a New Novel* you denounced "the myth of significance," and "the myth of profundity." But why myth? After all, we qualify a thought as being deep, so why not a novel?

ROBBE-GRILLET

If you ask that question it is because you yourself are a victim of the myth! Profundity or depth in a novel is a mythical dimension.

INTERVIEWER

Yet some of your books attain precisely a depth of feeling which points to a creative and poetic imagination at work; a charm which may be "senseless," if you wish, but still seductive. Nevertheless, doing away with classical novelistic devices such as characterization, plot, denouement, morality, . . . is in general a cop out, a way of making it easier for the writer. I am thinking of some very famous and highly successful novels, where a man delivers a monologue to his psychiatrist, or writes a series of letters. How very handy—you save your skin by avoiding thorny problems! There is no imagination, and without

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imagination you can create a thousand theories, but they won't work. Whereas some of your novels work *despite* your theories—or so it seems.

ROBBE-GRILLET

How pleased I am to hear you say that! I entirely agree with you. It is not often that anyone speaks about the imagination in my work, nor of the sense of poetry. Rather, the idea has spread that my books are dry, lacking in poetry, depth, humor, that I write "novels of statement." It is only in the last few years that these elements in my books have been noticed by a few critics—mostly in America. In England, critics have been very hostile. When *The Voyeur* was published, Philip Toynbee wrote in *The Observer* that it was one of the two most boring novels he had ever read. I wrote to him asking what the second one was. He never replied.

INTERVIEWER

Is there not a contradiction between the importance you attach to imagination and your condemnation of classical novelists like Balzac?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I am not against contradiction—I am all for it! Contradiction is one of the engines of fiction. But though Balzac invented everything, he imagined nothing. Now I believe that imagination is what motivates one to write and that it is the fundamental necessity of art.

INTERVIEWER

Is that why you have said recently that because the New Novel has become fashionable, it has to be questioned in order to stir the imagination?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I said that at the time when theoreticians such as Jean Louis Cardiou had tried to create a dogma of the New Novel, while

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I had always insisted that novelists had the right to re-invent the New Novel at every moment, and that there should be a *New* New Novel. There should never be fixed rules. As soon as rules become fixed, they should be broken, because the imagination must constantly renew itself. But then things began to go very fast in the opposite direction, and what happened was a return to traditional form: chronological, flawless, without contradiction. It was like an earthquake which shook the New Novel and produced a reaction in some people who became dogmatic in order to preserve the acquisitions of the New Novel. That in turn produced a third reaction, as if the New Novel had never happened, a return to well before Flaubert and Joyce, practically back to Zola. There is at the moment a tremendous anti-modern movement in all the arts: against abstract painting, and new music.

INTERVIEWER

Could it be because the New Novel caught on too quickly and became fashionable?

ROBBE-GRILLET

That is true. Although all the articles written about us at the beginning were condemnations, they paid us the compliment of talking about us constantly. We became famous without having any readers. Paradoxically, we began to have readers from the moment the tide of fashion turned—in the seventies. I even began to live on my earnings as a writer. Now every one reads us: not only has my autobiography become a bestseller, but last year Nathalie Sarraute's *Childhood* did equally well; this year Duras's *The Lover* has sold nearly a million copies in France alone—just like a *roman de gare*. At the same time we are beginning to become fashionable again, thanks to the anti-modern movement. To be anti-modern one has to speak about the Modernists in order to condemn them! It is the same for painting and music: in the fifties there was a great deal of invention and innovation—Pierre Boulez's *Domaines Musical*, the New Realism in painting, the New Wave in the cinema. . . . Now

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we are told that invention and innovation are over. So the creative artists of the fifties have become exceptional and are enjoying a new vogue.

INTERVIEWER

To go back to your themes: one of your central subjects seems to be eroticism, for example in *La Maison de Rendez-vous* or *Project for a Revolution in New York.* Though subtler, less explicit, than the eroticism of certain Anglo-Saxon writers, you have said that your own erotic tendencies are rather unconventional, that you have been influenced by de Sade.

ROBBE-GRILLET

I never said that! Others said that I had said that. I find de Sade an interesting writer, but I can't claim that he has influenced me, though I have to admit that my own erotic tastes are rather sadistic. I can't give you more details but you can have fun with the idea!

INTERVIEWER

What is the difference between eroticism and pornography, except that the one is considered "good" and the other "bad"?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I have proposed a definition which has been adopted. A French cabinet-minister has quoted it and mentioned me as its provenance; the sentence is now famous: "Pornography is the eroticism of others." Which means, as you said, that pornography is bad and eroticism is not. But there is perhaps a more general difference: pornography is direct and eroticism is indirect. In eroticism, there is a critical distance and a judgement on sexual impulses, while pornography is the absence of judgment. When the crudity of the sexual act goes through the imagination it becomes eroticism, and when it doesn't, it is pornography. At least that is what I think.

INTERVIEWER

I would like to go back for a moment to your pre-celebrity

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days, when you lived in dire poverty. How did you work? And has your work routine changed radically?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I work less now because I do too many things. In those days I worked long hours as I had nothing else to do. I read a fair amount, traveled very little, and went out seldom, since going to the cinema or the theater required money which I didn't have. I lived rather miserably, in a minuscule room where there was no room for a table, and I wrote on my knees. But I did not suffer. I was very content living like that.

INTERVIEWER

And now that you have a comfortable flat in Paris and a house in the country, how do you work?

ROBBE-GRILLET

In France, I work in the country. I am a professor at New York University, and lecture at other colleges too. I teach only three hours a week, which mean I spend the rest of my time writing. But I don't write in Paris, nor on lecture tours.

INTERVIEWER

Do you still read a great deal?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I am a slow reader; as a result I read very little these days because I have too much to do.

INTERVIEWER

What do you read nowadays? Do you still read philosophy? You said that you had introduced Husserl and Heidegger to Foucault.

ROBBE-GRILLET

I have no training in philosophy proper. I have not read the great basic works. I have read secondary works: for example, Heidegger's *What Is Philosophy?* but not his *Being and Time*.

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The same goes for Hegel, whose *Phenomenology Of The Spirit* I have not read, but I know him through Kojeve's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, translated by Raymond Queneau. As for Husserl, I read Sartre's essay on him, *L'Intentionalité.* In fact I have learned a bit about German philosophy through Sartre. Incidentally, the knowledge of philosophy among the French critics is nil! One critic used the word "phenomenology" in reference to my work, in total ignorance of what it meant! As if phenomena were things that exist *per se*, independent of the human eye and consciousness. While Husserl maintains the very opposite view. Of course, I believe that *The Stranger* and *The Voyeur* are phenomenological novels insofar as they present a perception of human consciousness which is of phenomenological order. But when a critic uses this word and changes its meaning, he discards completely the consciousness of the narrator, or the observer, as if there was nothing but "things," which is completely antinomic with Husserl's thinking. I am certain that I change these philosophers—as indeed Sartre did.

INTERVIEWER

Now that you have less time to read, do you choose more carefully? What do you read now?

ROBBE-GRILLET

You see all these piles of books? They all arrived since January. Some three hundred in four months! I can't read them all. I pick them up, look at them, read a bit at random, and that is that.

INTERVIEWER

What about systematic reading—things you want to, or have to read?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Did you know that until very recently there was not a complete edition of *Being and Time* in French? I hope that I can find an old edition in an American university. I intend to read

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it right through. When one is a teacher, one becomes a student again.

INTERVIEWER

Are you disciplined? Do you keep regular working hours?

ROBBE-GRILLET

No. I am not very disciplined but it usually works out that I do things at the same time. I get up late, have breakfast slowly, and start work at 11 A.M. I work through till 3 or 4, and then I have a meal, perhaps a nap, start again around 8, and work through till midnight. So, twice four hours. At the moment I am writing the sequel to the *Mirror*, entitled *Romanesque.* It has taken me a month to write seven pages!

INTERVIEWER

Do you have an idea of what is going to happen when you start a novel? You said about *The Stranger* that it was the situation that dictated the act—of murder.

ROBBE-GRILLET

It is not the situation that dictates the act of murder, it is the *text.* In *The Stranger*, it is linked with the use of the past participle and the rhythm of the sentences. The text is the carrier of this Husserlian phenomenology, and that is what will produce the crime. One has to be wary using the word "situation," for it has Sartrian connotations of social situation, whereas I mean the situation *in the text.*

INTERVIEWER

Nevertheless you must have a general idea, otherwise how do you start a novel?

ROBBE-GRILLET

It is hard to describe. I have an idea of the beginning. I write the first line and continue to the last. I correct a great deal, work hard and write several drafts, but I never question the finished work. So I start with the first words which will be the

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first words of the book, but I never know how it will develop or end. The first idea is vague, but I know that it is the generating force—later everything can change. I can well imagine Proust writing: "For a long time I used to go to bed early . . ." and not knowing what story he was going to tell.

INTERVIEWER

I bet he knew!

ROBBE-GRILLET

Of course he did!

INTERVIEWER

If you have written only seven pages in one month, are you anxious about it going so slowly? Hemingway said that he always left something for the next morning so as not to start the day staring at a blank page and not knowing what was going to happen.

ROBBE-GRILLET

The excitement is in *not* knowing. And you mustn't write if you don't feel like it.

INTERVIEWER

What gives you the desire to write every morning?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I don't know. The difficulty is the first page of the novel; afterwards one is pushed by an energy in what one has already written.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever been tempted to write for the theater?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Yes, but I haven't been able to. I can't fulfill *all* my temptations, can I?

—**Shusha Guppy**

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Two Stories by H. G. Sanders

Boom Job

The essence of espionage is duplicity. A clandestine operation without successful deception is not a clandestine operation. In no other field of human endeavor is the widely denigrated maxim concerning justification of means by ends still held in such high regard. "Spooks," as they are called, deal in the devious; lie, cheat and steal is the name of the game. And it sometimes comes to pass that they prey upon each other for various reasons doubtless considered good in some quarter. In the business, few professionals have more than three close friends. Wise survivors have none. There are exceptions, but it is generally held that even with those who succeed in retiring from the business with reasonable honor and persona intact, it's not over when it's over. After all, a trained and experienced unemployed spook is a rare resource and an attractive target. His experience and abilities should not be wasted.

It was one of those bad jobs that somebody has to do. Somebody in this case was me, since Barstow and I had been lieutenants together in Korea back in the crazy days and there was nobody else around with those credentials anymore. We had made our bones together and collaborated on a few projects over the years, but I had eventually moved up and he got busted. Win some, lose some.

So there I was, walking into a run-down rural tavern, wearing Salvation Army redneck clothes and a week's growth of beard. He wasn't hard to find; just backtrack from the eight ball. I sat at the bar drinking Coors and watching my old buddy perform on the pool table. Changed a lot—looks straight out of Dogpatch. Long black hair and beard streaked with gray, greasy leather cowboy hat, faded jeans, plaid flannel shirt, dirty suede jacket with a frontier fringe, logger boots. Bit thinner. Looks sick, but eyes still sharp and looks mean. That's my boy.

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Barstow finished off his opponent with a five ball run, collected a dollar, then walked to the bar next to me and ordered a San Miguel dark. We made eye contact in the bar mirror and he waited for me to make the move. I did.

"Hi, Stow."

"Well, hello there, old buddy. How you doing?"

"Okay, how's by you?"

"Oh, can't complain. I'm making it all right."

I jumped right in. "Stow, I'm here because we know you got a heavy problem. The word was two months, wasn't it?"

Barstow took a long pull on his beer and lit a Camel with a kitchen match before answering. "Why would the Rabbit Ranch be keeping track of my health?"

"I'm not with those clowns any more, Stow; managed to get on with some serious cats a few years back. Serious. They keep track of people, you never know."

"Yeah? So what's the deal?"

"Remember Chris?"

Barstow nodded. "Yeah, nice guy."

"Remember what happened to him and who did it?"

"I saw the body, man. You don't forget that kind of cash-out."

My turn to nod. "Yeah, bad scene. Well, it seems that the good Colonel who conducted that particular interrogation is now the Foreign Minister of his country. Ran a coup last year, put his uncle in as President and his dimwit brother in command of the military. Now he's got big ideas about rocking the Third World boat drastically. He's coming to address the UN, and that we don't need."

Barstow smiled slowly. "Contract?"

I nodded grimly. "You got it. Interested?"

"Solo, or do I get back-up?"

I shook my head. "No back-up. Complete casing, operational data and access. We'll grease what we can with his security people."

Barstow stubbed out his Camel and lit another. "Sounds like a one-way trip."

I took a deep breath. "Look, Stow, I've seen your X-rays and one of our doctors has talked to your doctor. The timing is right, the money is good, the cause is just. So let's not worry about

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the irrelevant. It's very simple: Do you want to fade away in this dump and die hard in bed, or do you want to go out big and do your country a valuable service on the way? What the hell have you got to lose?

Barstow laughed and drained his beer. "Man, I haven't heard such patriotic shit in years. You're touching my fucking heart. How much are you cats talking for this little gig?"

"One hundred thousand cash, paid anyhow, anywhere, anywho you want it."

"What's the catch?"

"It's got to be a boom job."

Barstow ordered another beer and watched the pool game, as he considered the proposition. Finally, he looked at me with a smile and nodded his head. "Yeah, I got it. You want me to walk right up to that bastard and detonate. Very clean. No way to identify assassin if there ain't no body. Plausible denial."

I nodded solemnly. "Well?"

"Two conditions."

"Shoot."

"I want Chris's widow to know that an old friend evened the score."

"Okay, what else?"

"Now, don't laugh. I want a fucking medal."

I was astounded. "What! You want a medal? Come on, Stow. When the hell did we ever get any medals?"

Barstow looked at me very seriously and spoke with precision. "I have a son in California who thinks all I did in the service was shuffle paper. If I do this job, I want you to personally guarantee presentation of a posthumous award for bravery, or above and beyond, or some such crap. Hang it on Korea or Quemoy or Nam, but just get it to the kid with some kind of little ceremony. I want him to think better of me than he does."

I sighed and shook my head. "Okay, Stow. Understand. You got a deal. We'll get the Governor to make a presentation on behalf of the President, how's that?"

"Oh, hot shit, man, that's great! I like that! A fucking hero at last! My cup runneth over and out."

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"Don't get carried away, asshole, you made a good deal. Why don't I meet you here at noon tomorrow and we can talk details."

"Sounds good, old buddy. Glad you thought of me. Not often a busted spook gets the chance to go out big for . . . what was that you said, a just cause? Yeah, that was it. A fucking just cause."

"Don't put me on, Stow. Have we got a deal or not?"

Barstow looked around the dingy tavern slowly, then spent a long moment staring down into his ashtray. He lit another cigarette and stared at himself in the bar mirror. Finally he spoke.

"Boom job."

I said, "Yeah."

Barstow sighed deeply. "Okay, deal."

I said, "Thanks, see you tomorrow," and split. Across the street I stopped and looked back. Barstow was racking the balls.

After it was all over, after my boy had gone out big, I sat in the airport lounge and drank rum as I watched them trying to clean up the mess down by Gate 9. Cops, medics, airport security, fire truck, two ambulances, two TV crews, airline and airport executives and employees milling around the smoking hole in the tarmac. Too late, guys. Old Barstow's done gone.

I ordered another drink and went over the operation in my mind, looking for loose ends. All okay, mission accomplished. No problem on the rest of the money; Stow accepted the co-sign deal as a standard professional precaution and that account was cleaned out with a simple computer trick when the plastique went off. Nice touch, that, hooking the remote detonator into the action net frequency. Tech shop's getting pretty slick. Poor old Stow, he only drew four grand on the advance and he gave most of that away to his tavern buddies. Okay, no sweat on the money, so I won't have Finance on my ass.

The rum was good. Down below at Gate 9, two cops were having a shoving match with a TV cameraman. Suddenly, three FBI types came striding urgently out to the crater. Christ, Hoover's been dead for years and you can still spot them a mile away. Well, there sure ain't much left to investigate; amazing what a half pound of plastique will do.

Amazing what three slugs of 151 rum will do. I'm getting

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quite an edge on. Oh well, only have to make it to Gate 26. Wonder if Stow really bought the story, wonder if he really would have pulled the plug if we hadn't gone remote on him? Neat, the way Tech put together that old-fashioned bang-pack with a subminiature remote detonator buried inside—they're improving. Funny Stow didn't ask if there was a remote option. He was definitely old school—just walk up to the cat and "BOOM!" Too bad it wasn't the cat he was expecting. We got to get that bastard some day.

The PA system called my flight, so I left a ten on the table and limped down the concourse to Gate 26. On the way, I briefly considered trying to follow through on the medal deal, but the great minds at the Rabbit Ranch would never buy such unprofessional sentimentality. Too bad. That's the last thing Stow said to me when we shook hands: "Don't forget the medal." Too bad. Can't win them all.

The flight back to Dulles was bumpy and the stews were unfriendly. I drank rum and coke and snickered over the latest best-selling espionage fantasy. Ain't that way, man, just ain't done that way.

My driver picked me up at baggage and drove me home. He was more talkative than usual. "How'd it go?"

"Okay."

"Good."

Thirty-two hours later, I was standing in front of the Chief of Operations' desk, bleeding from the pores. He was definitely pissed.

"You are aware that there is a problem with the bank?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Perhaps you can explain to me just how a Senior Staff Agent of your experience managed to foul up a simple operation of this nature and cost us one-hundred thousand dollars."

I gave it a try. "Sir, the Technical Division assured me that their computer center could remove . . ." Herr Doktor Schnell cut me off.

"Sir, I protest! My people performed exactly as specified. The account has a loan security block on it to which we do not have the access code. We were instructed only to monitor withdrawals

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prior to the unload phase and thus did not detect the loan block input. When the action signal came, we immediately initiated the unload process and ran into a block code which is unique to that particular bank branch. The Technical Division is not at fault in this debacle and I resent any such implications."

The Chief nodded tiredly without looking at our Teutonic genius. "Yes, Gustave, I understand. Please relax." Turning to our friendly Finance Director, he asked, "Have you got it figured out yet?"

Old Moneybags had been straining at the bit. "Yes, Sir. Quite simple, actually. Barstow went to another branch of the same bank and obtained a ninety-thousand dollar loan, using the money in the operational account as security. The bank transmitted the ninety-thousand dollars electronically to a numbered Swiss account. Since our last budget cut, my liaison section lacks the resources to penetrate a Swiss bank. They estimate it would take approximately twenty-thousand dollars to determine the identity of the numbered account holder."

Schnell chimed in. "My people say at least fifteen thousand dollars to get the loan security block code."

The Chief sighed deeply. "And no guarantee on either, right?"

It was a duet: "Right, Sir."

Turning back to me with an unsympathetic glare, the Chief spoke softly and patiently. "I have read the operations plan and your contact reports. Didn't it strike you as odd that Barstow only drew four thousand dollars out of the account, or did I miss something?"

"It's in my last contact report, Sir, which is probably still in the Field Scan shop. On the day before the action, Barstow asked me to send the rest of the money to his son after the hit. He had a withdrawal slip and a cashier's check application all made out and signed. I was supposed to cosign and send the check if things went off on schedule. Since he didn't know about the remote detonator, I had to go along with it since something could have gone wrong—a flat tire, anything."

The Chief said, "Hmmmmm. Looks like we were a bit premature in dumping Barstow. For a busted spook that's been out of the business for ten years, he sure put the con on you."

I nodded manfully. "At least he did the job."

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The Chief looked at me sadly and slowly shook his head. "Somebody did the job. I watched it on TV. Somebody in white ground crew coveralls, wearing a cap, noise suppressor earmuffs and dark glasses was standing under the mobile landing stair when the target disembarked and the plastique went off. Would you swear it was our boy?"

I thought about that for quite a while. Stow had shaved his beard and got a haircut, and I had left him in the underground employees' garage a good half hour before boom time. It was possible, just remotely possible. "No, Sir, I can't."

The Chief nodded slowly and smiled in a strange way. Then he dismissed the others, lit a Havana and stared out at rural Virginia. Finally, he told me to sit down; the inquisition was over and maybe my career was, too. We just sat there for a while as the smoke got thicker. Then he said, "That bit about the medal was interesting. Nice touch. Really sucked you in."

"Sir?"

"His son died of a heroin overdose in Pasadena last March. The cops notified Barstow. Nice touch."

I had no reply. Humility training is best endured in silence. But I found myself thinking of a night in Saigon a long time ago, with Stow and two other old hands. We were sitting around drinking Algerienne when the news came on and we learned that they had positively identified Ché Guevara's body. We all had a drink to Ché out of professional courtesy. Now I was thinking that Stow had sure earned his medal and been pretty damn slick doing it. Proud to have had him for a friend.

The Chief stubbed out his cigar and told me to go back to work. I paused at the door. "Sir, what about the money? This puts a hell of a hole in our operational funds."

The Chief laughed bitterly. "Don't worry about it. We'll get it back. We were set up from inside. Stop at Security and ask Lee to come see me."

"Yes, Sir." I left.

Two months later, our Finance Director dropped dead of an alleged heart attack. About the same time, Herr Doktor Schnell suddenly resigned and reportedly retired to his native land. Barstow still hasn't surfaced, but I hope he's in good health.

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Smiling Time

During the Watergate Era, there were several periods when certain members of Congress discovered that they could gain a day's headlines by righteously denigrating our civilian and military clandestine resources. The media cooperated handsomely. Thus it was that an exodus of good but bitter men occurred in 1973 and 1974, leaving our human source intelligence collection agencies somewhat stripped of experienced personnel. The majority of those who left did so quietly, swallowing their professional pride as decades of incredibly difficult work were sacrificed to the egos of a few fat-mouthed Senators and Representatives. Most of those prematurely retired veterans of the silent war went on to a smooth integration into civilian society. Some did not.

The electric wheelchair rolled silently out on the auditorium stage through a swinging door held open by a Secret Service agent. Its occupant was a large man in VA pajamas, wearing a bandage helmet pierced with eye holes. A cast enclosed his right forearm and hand in a rigid karate chop. His left forearm was also encased in plaster, although the hand was free to operate the wheelchair controls. A blue hospital blanket covered his lap and legs. He smiled and nodded thanks to the agent as he skillfully pivoted the chair to line up with the row of Vets awaiting decoration. The agent muttered "poor bastards" and shook his head.

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The speaker was in good form. Although not yet an announced candidate for re-election, his short speech left no doubt that he would be willing to continue his stewardship if the public so desired. In closing, he articulated a few touching platitudes concerning the sacrifices of the military and the alleged glory of their mutilation.

The speaker's words were greeted with enthusiastic applause by his aides, the hospital staff and a few members of the media and security entourage. The human wreckage comprising the bulk of the audience, immersed in a common ocean of pain and neglect stretching from Verdun to Vietnam, sat in silence; few of them had ever voted.

An aide came forward with a tray of medals and the speaker began working his way down the line of the maimed and nominally heroic. He had appreciative and comforting words for each veteran along with a medal. Handshakes and salutes were exchanged where possible. Some confusion occurred at the end of the line, since the tray was one medal short. The speaker, hiding his irritation with the famous boyish smile, questioned his nervous aide as they stood before the large man in the last wheelchair.

But then, in a gesture worthy of John Wayne, the big man slowly rose to his feet and said, "Just give me a salute, Sir." The speaker smiled as he saw this great bit on the six o'clock news and he snapped to attention, swinging his arm up in a sharp Hollywood salute. The big Vet slowly raised his right arm in response, slowly raised the heavy cast to his forehead and smiled down on the speaker.

It was a great media moment; the Marine Band should have been playing inspirational martial music in the background. The TV crews were sucking it up and the speaker was most content to hold his salute for maximum coverage. That's how people remember him—trim, erect, saluting with a proud and brilliant smile—because the networks never showed the rest to the public. It was gory, alright. Guys in the third row were splashed with blood when that encasted arm whipped down to split the speaker's skull wide open. And of course the lights went out before he hit the floor and then all hell broke loose.

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They are still looking for the big guy. He took out a Secret Service man and a local cop on his way out. One of them may live. The funny thing about the whole deal was that when the lights came back on about three minutes later, most of the patients were still sitting quietly in their seats and some of them were smiling.

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Portfolio

Subjects and Objects

Donald Baechler

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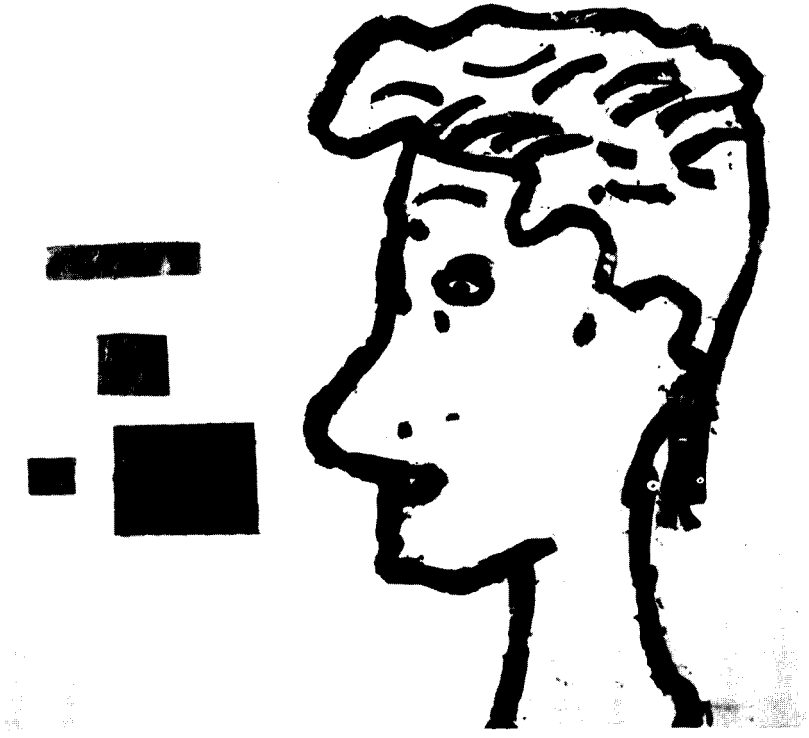

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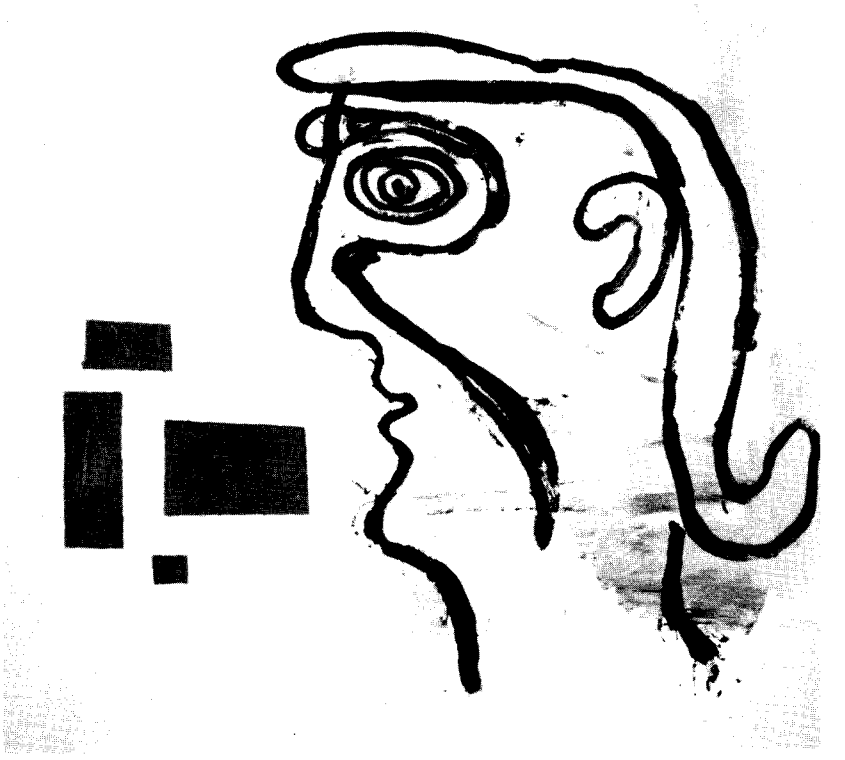

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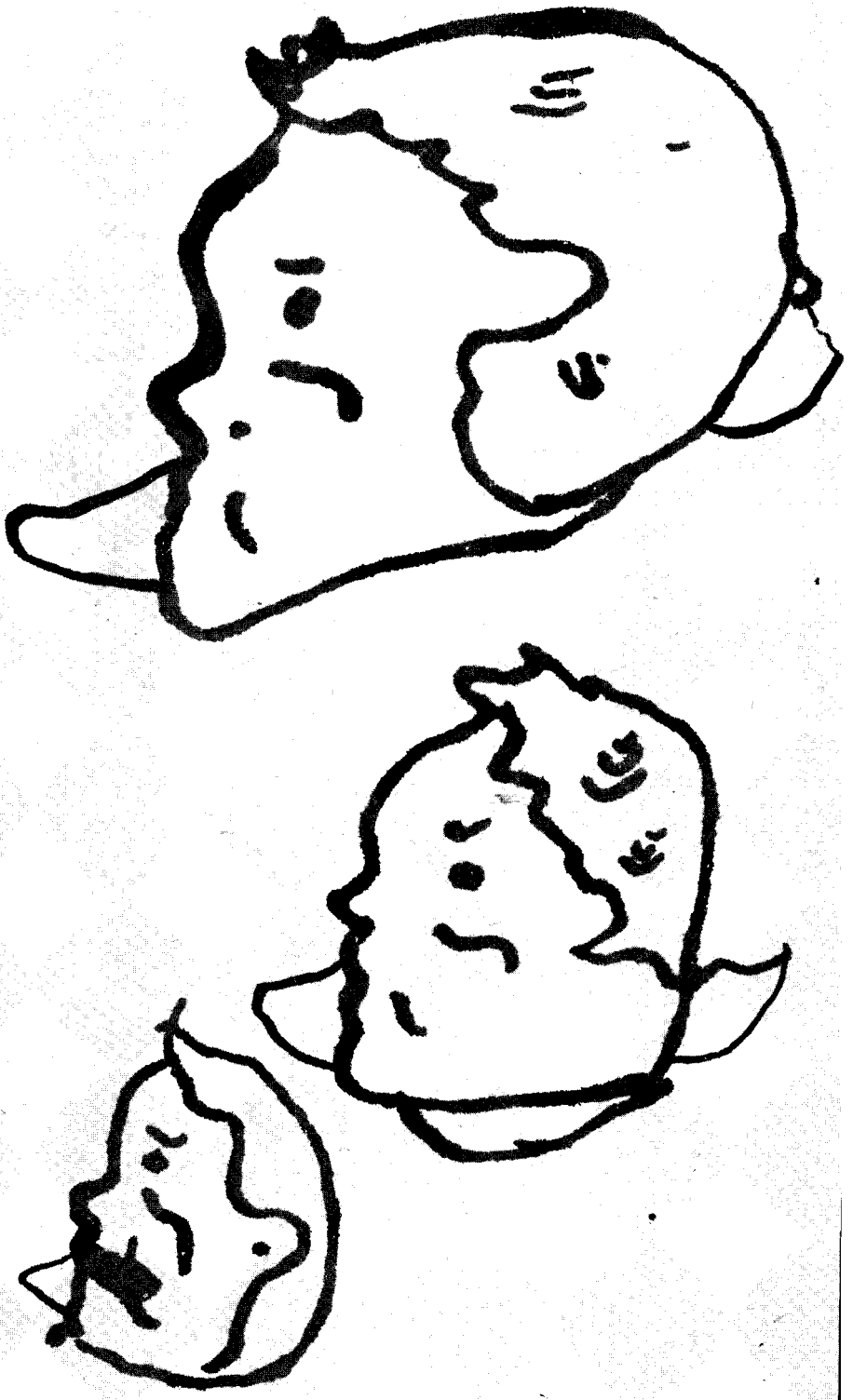

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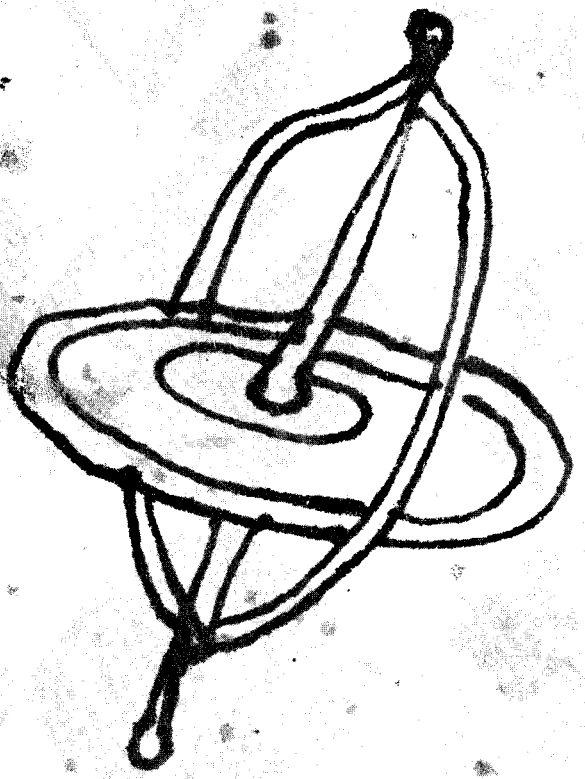

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Five Poems by Gavin Ewart

Sally

"Are you interested in knowing when and whom you will marry? What the year will bring you? If you will gain in a lawsuit? . . . What are you best adapted for? If you have enemies and who? If you can trust your friends? Why your love acts strange? What lies in the future and what fate awaits you?"
— New York street handout.

Anglo-Saxon Sally operates between Third and Lexington—
she makes large claims:
"Forecasts—Future—Past—Present"
with Palm, Tarot Cards, Crystal Ball, Readings.
Are her clients all dames?

Or does the SPECIAL WITH THIS AD Regular Card
  Reading
$5.00 OFF
offered to the street-passers
pull in young, confused, gullible, male New Yorkers,
chauvinist at the pig-trough?

Tune in to those thoughts: "Why don't that Marylene let me touch up her ass?"
"Why she act so strange, man?"
It doesn't seem likely, probable—or possible even.
No, a different class,

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the unsure more-than-mature woman is here targeted.
"That Mrs. Feinblatt,
she look at me in a funny way!"
"Ed don't love me any more. He think I'm done for, past it!"
"Mr. Fink's a dirty rat."

Or just a bit younger? When Romance can be mentioned,
Love that will last.
"Will Wilbur ever kiss me?"
Sally knows these thoughts like the color of the dollars,
forecasting the Past.

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Miles Williamson-Noble

(De Mortuis)

The Colonel didn't like him (my guess).
He called him Mr. Wilkinson-Noble
(there was another officer in the unit called Wilkinson).
(Some people, of course, didn't like the Colonel.)

On bad days he looked like the dog Pluto.
He was rather affected and snobbish
(of me he said, "I *believe* he was a commercial traveler")
(He got married and said, "*Il faut travailler pour faire l'amour*!").

When the unit was about to go overseas (1942)
his father pulled some strings, got him a home posting
(his father was a rich and successful surgeon)
(my father did quite well as a surgeon too—but he hadn't any strings).

When this happened the Battery subalterns,
(egged on, I think, by the Battery Captain)
got drunk one night and poured cold water over him
as he lay asleep in bed (it was quite a cold winter).

We were in tents. I heard the screaming and cursing.
I hadn't been approached to assist this persecution
(he was my Troop Commander, I was Troop Leader)
(perhaps they felt there would be feelings of loyalty).

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I didn't hate him, but I knew he was unpopular.
I remember another officer saying to me, "A certain person
who's lying in bed with a scent-spray up his arse!"
(but he wasn't effeminate, just very superior).

My Battery Commander had said, "That's the medical
profession for you!" (and he'd looked at me in a point-
scoring way).
The funny thing was that after he was posted
we heard he'd been killed (was he bombed or something?).

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Putney OAPs in 1985

They dribble down the High Street/ in dribs and drabs,
on sticks,
the wrinkle-faced old women,/ the men with "past it"
pricks,
slow among the mums who/ wrestle with push-chair kids,
they stop for "Hello, stranger!s"/ or "Well, I never did!s",
clots in the pavement's bloodstream/ that bike-boys put at
risk,
they wince at teenage swearing,/ tut-tutting or tsk-tsk!

When Thatcher was a nothing/ and keen on boys or
horses,
they underwent the bombing,/ and the danger of the
Forces.
MPs who live for money/ and the well-being of the City
don't reckon much these old ones,/ they're a bore, a drag,
a pity—
not beautiful, attractive,/ fashionable or bright,
why can't they get a move on/ into that long goodnight?

They don't appear on chat shows,/ not many ask their
views,
they're has-beens of the media,/ they never will be news.
So close down the old people's/ hospitals and homes
(the Welfare State, quite clearly,/ isn't loved by well-fed
gnomes),
forget the War they fought in,/ way out beyond the brink—
because it *doesn't matter*/ what such old seniles think!

Note: OAPs are Old Age Pensioners (Senior Citizens). MPs are Members of Parliament.

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The Difference

Are women writing odes
to cocks that fuck them,
describing episodes
when they might suck them?
Oh, no, they're very quiet,
they're almost sly—
although in rut and riot
their lives go by.

Men, on the other hand,
write it all down,
each stiffness and each stand,
each swirling gown,
each wetness, wild and warm,
each hardened nipple—
a very passionate storm!
Ponds with no ripple

the women are, but deep;
why advertise it?
The men with whom they sleep
may not disguise it,
may give it all away—
but *they* are clever.
The night is not the day,
nor will be, ever.

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Screaming Venus

If you believe the novels
(and why shouldn't you believe them?)
there are some passionate women who really let go and
scream and yell when they come—
it's as though a man were murdering a mad monkey.
And all because of continuous
lubricious friction on the bum!

I've not met it myself
(perhaps they weren't passionate women?
or I wasn't stimulating enough to earn this tribute).
Moans there were and some sighs—
but nothing to raise the roof or annoy neighbors,
after all the strong, sinuous
delicious locking of thighs.

One girl I loved was frigid
(but this didn't make me not love her).
Ideas about sex—if they're rigid—can often be wrong too.
Pleasure, yes. Orgasm, no.
That's all she had, but very much better than nothing.
The dance was the thing, and contiguous
ambitious quick, quick, slow.

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Another Drunk Gambler

Craig Nova

I know more secrets than any man I have ever met. My neighbor, Harlow Pearson, was a gambler, although this was never a secret and many people knew about it, even when he was in Congress. He came from New England, was tall, and thin, broad in the chest. I am an old man now. I sit in my house, hearing the shutters banging in the winter wind, and I think of things from a long time ago, like the time when Harlow was a young man in Ipoh. His gambling before Ipoh had been done in European casinos, especially those with chandeliers and chamber music played by musicians in evening clothes, and where there were men who stood around the roulette tables with small notebooks taking down the number on each turn of the wheel. Gambling made Harlow feel as though he were participating in the world. He hated to be a bystander. He tried to explain gambling by saying that it was the difference between walking through an abandoned orchard with a gun and a dog, looking for grouse, and just walking.

Harlow had a houseboy, and his name was Xan Thu. In America he was called Xannie. Xannie's parents had been Asian tribesmen, and in 1950 Xannie was working as a groom at the race track at Ipoh, in Malaysia. He spent his nights there at

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the racetrack, too, sleeping at the back of a barn, his bed made on bales of hay, on which he stretched out, hearing the rustle of it and feeling the itch through a thin blanket he spread there and smelling the dusty, grassy odor. He took his meals alone, eating while he squatted and leaned against a stall door, or back where he slept. There were other grooms, too, and they found their places to sleep in the barn, each one having a small bag in which there were a few personal things, a book, a photograph, a comb, an extra white shirt, a pair of dark pants.

The man Xannie worked for most often was half French and half Burmese; he was heavy, bald, and had greenish eyes. His skin was smooth, an olive brown color. His suits were made in London, and he wore a large, gold watch that gave the time for any place on the earth. The man's name was Pierre Bouteille. There were times when he couldn't sleep and came to wake Xannie up.

"Are you sleeping?" said Pierre.

"No," said Xannie.

"Have you seen any thieves?" said Pierre.

"No," said Xannie.

Then Pierre said, "Come outside." Xannie went with him, and Pierre gave him an American cigarette, a Camel, and they both smoked, feeling the wet, Malaysian sky, and seeing the clouds floating along, made visible by the sickly light of the city.

Pierre told Xannie about the places he'd been. He said Parisian women and Dutch women, too, would do anything for money, that New York was filled with madmen, that there was a desert in Yugoslavia. America had more food than anyone thought imaginable. There were Malaysians and Burmese who had made money gambling and in restaurants in America, and some had become doctors and university professors. There was a Malaysian pediatrician in Chicago. . . . Xannie smoked a cigarette and thought about piles of food: he saw a cone, high as a volcano, that was made of rice. He smoked the cigarette down to the butt, burning his fingers.

Pierre had a horse he'd bought in the Philippines. It was a good horse with fine breeding and had originally come from Lexington, Kentucky. Pierre was concerned about the horse,

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afraid that it would be stolen, and he spent nights looking into its stall, saying that there were dishonest people around, and that you had to be on guard against them. Pierre had once gotten drunk in town and fallen asleep in an alley, and when he had woken up, he saw that someone had stolen his shoes. They had been white shoes. When Pierre stood and stared into the stall, Xannie was with him, wanting to hear about the Parisian and Dutch women and the food in America, but he only stared into the dark stall, hearing the restless movement of the horse. When Pierre felt reassured he said, "Let's go for a cigarette."

The horse was worked regularly. One night after the horse had been pushed a little harder than usual by a trainer, Pierre came into the room where Xannie slept and woke him by shaking his leg, and then told Xannie to go into town in a taxi and to bring a veterinarian. It was after one o'clock in the morning and Xannie was to tell the vet that he had a sick dog. Pierre gave Xannie a package of Camels, and Xannie rode in the taxi, with the windows rolled up in a thunderstorm, smoking a cigarette. He brought the veterinarian back, a Frenchman who looked carefully into the taxi and who waited for it to air out before he got into it. When they got back to the track, Xannie was left alone in front of the barn to watch while the veterinarian went back to take a look.

In the morning the horse was gone, but the next night, about one, it was brought back. The veterinarian had taken the animal to his clinic, where he had an X-ray machine and a table for the horse, and soon the doctor was back again to talk to Pierre and to show him the strange black and white photographs of a bone in one of the horse's feet. There was a long, definite crack in it, and the veterinarian told Pierre that one, good hard run, and the bone would break. The veterinarian said the foot would "explode." It was best to sell the animal right away, he said, and then he left.

For a few days Xannie heard nothing, but in the middle of the night Pierre came into his room and asked if he was sleeping and if Xannie had seen any thieves. Xannie noticed that Pierre didn't say "thieves" with the same horror as usual: there was a softness in his tone that verged on the affectionate. Xannie

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said he hadn't seen any thieves, and then he and Pierre went outside to smoke. Pierre had been drinking, and he weaved from side to side as he said, "You know that goddamned vet blabbed? Everyone knows about the horse. How the hell can I sell him now?"

Pierre hadn't offered a cigarette and Xannie looked at the lights of the city. When Pierre spoke, he gestured with the hand that held the cigarette, and the orange tip of it streaked through the night, making lines that looked like neon tubing, and Xannie watched the bright, curved shapes and listened to Pierre's deep breathing.

"Is the horse insured?" said Xannie.

"Yes," said Pierre.

They both looked at the lights of the city and the grey and yellow clouds above it.

"Is it insured for theft?" said Xannie.

"Yes," said Pierre.

"It would take a stupid thief to steal a lame horse," said Xannie.

"Not everyone knows," said Pierre, "and is it my business to worry about the brains of thieves? They've been known to make a mistake or two. Look."

He pointed to the horizon, at a light there, which was in the direction of the jail in Ipoh. Behind them there was the large, wooden barn, the sense of the animals in it, uneasy in the stalls filled with sawdust.

"It can be arranged," said Xannie.

"I want to know nothing about it," said Pierre.

They stood side by side. After awhile Xannie said, "Six hundred dollars. Tens and twenties."

"Three hundred," said Pierre, "I am not a rich man."

"All right," said Xannie, "Three hundred and fifty and a set of papers for a horse with different breeding. Bad breeding, a different color, but the same age and sex."

Pierre sighed and said, "All right. Would you like a cigarette? A Camel?"

Xannie took one and lighted it, pulling the smoke into his mouth and standing there, watching the lights of the city, the

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large, lumpy clouds, and thinking, while he heard the horses moving in the stalls behind him, of the Parisian and Dutch women and of the piles of rice in America as big as mountains.

The next day the horse and Xannie were gone.

In 1950, Harlow was in the navy, and he spent some time in Malaysia, at Ipoh. Ipoh is a crowded city, and during the monsoon it rained so hard it made you feel as though you were standing in a shower with your clothes on. The sky turned purple during the monsoon, dark as an ugly bruise. Anyway, one day Harlow was walking down a street that was lined with closed-up shops and warehouses. The shops were shut up with metal doors that rolled down from above the windows, and the warehouses had large padlocks, some of which were as large as a book. At the back and front of each building's roof there were rolls of barbed wire. The warehouses were used on a short-term basis, and could be rented for as little as twenty-four hours at a time. Harlow walked down the street and stopped in front of one that held bicycles. The city was filled with pedestrians, cars, motorcycles, and bicycles, but Harlow had never seen a horse in it. There wasn't enough room in the city for horses. He stopped in front of the bicycle warehouse because he had almost stepped in a pile of horse manure.

The door to the warehouse wasn't locked, and when Harlow pushed it open he saw by the dusky light in the street that bicycles were stacked on the floor and hung from the walls and rafters. When the light from the street hit the wheels of the bicycles they looked delicate, almost fragile, like the spokes of an umbrella without the cloth. After a while, Harlow heard someone say, "Close the door."

Harlow pushed the door shut, and the hinges made a slow, insect-like screech. He didn't close the door completely. When he turned around, an electric light came on, and the bicycles were clearly visible, hanging in the air overhead. At the back of the room, which was narrow and not very long, there was an Asian man, dressed in a pair of dark pants and a white shirt, who was holding the halter of a horse. The horse, even in the dim, yellowish light, was clearly a thoroughbred.

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Harlow came a little closer, stepping over the bicycles and looking around the warehouse, but he saw no one else. There was only the uncomfortable, confined horse, the Oriental man, the grey walls of the place, the shiny spokes of the bicycles and the piles of black rubber tires and inner tubes, many of which had been patched so many times as to look exotic, like the coils of some enormous pink and black snake. Harlow and the Oriental man didn't stand close together, but they each took a long, frank look into the other's face, and while they stood there, it became clear that what had begun as an intrusion or perhaps even a burglary had ended, for a while anyway, as a limited partnership.

Harlow introduced himself. The man said his name was Xan Thu. Harlow ran his hand over the horse's cheek, along the muscled, arched neck, and down its chest.

"Where did you get the horse?" said Harlow.

Xannie blinked at him.

"Is it stolen?" said Harlow.

"No," said Xannie, "it's not hot. But, in all honesty, I'd have to say that it's a little warm."

"Hmmm," said Harlow, "how warm?"

Xannie blinked again.

"Let's put it this way," said Harlow, "do you think anyone at the track here would recognize it?"

"Anything is possible," said Xannie.

Harlow looked over the horse a little more. When he faced Xannie again he found on a crate next to Xannie's elbow a piece of newsprint. It hadn't been there before, and when Harlow picked it up he saw it was a past performance sheet, two months old, that had come from a track in Manila. It had been neatly folded, but was still water marked and yellowed. In the center, circled with a lead pencil, there was a chart for a three year old horse that in fifteen starts had showed in three, placed in three, and won nine. Harlow recognized the breeding.

"What do you say," said Harlow, "why don't we run him at the track here?"

"There's the problem of being recognized," said Xannie.

"We can fix that," said Harlow. "Let's change the color."

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"Yes," said Xannie, looking at the horse. "Let's change the color."

"What's the penalty for stealing a horse here?" said Harlow.

Xannie said it depended on the owner. Some had been known to take the law into their own hands. Both Harlow and Xannie had seen the tattooed gangsters in the city, some of whom had a stump instead of a finger, the digit given to a hoodlum as a gesture of loyalty. Harlow looked over the horse again, read the performance chart, took another frank look at Xannie's face.

"I wouldn't want to have any trouble," said Harlow.

"No," said Xannie, "isn't that why dyeing the horse is a good idea?"

Harlow sighed and said he guessed it was. Then he went out of the warehouse and down the street to the avenue, where he took a taxi to a grocery. The taxi waited while Harlow bought ten packages of black Rit dye, two natural sponges, and a stack of towels. Then he got back into the taxi. When they were close to the warehouse, Harlow told the driver to let him off on the corner, and, as he walked along the street, he looked over his shoulder.

Xannie and Harlow found a galvanized tub and they filled it with water. They mixed in the dye, a little at a time, and while they stirred it around, they looked into one another's face, each thinking about the odds on the day they'd race the horse. Then they went to work, neither one of them saying a word about the color, since both of them had already decided on grey.

Harlow dipped a sponge into the tub and tried it against the horse's withers, and Xannie used one of the towels to rub the place dry. They stood back and admired the sickly, grey-black color. Then Xannie took the other sponge and they went to work, rubbing the dye into the horse's coat, drying it, and standing back to judge the change. When they were done the horse was covered with the doubt-inspiring color, which was suggestive of bad breeding and lousy nerves. More than anything else, it was the color of a weathered headstone in a New England cemetery.

Both Xannie and Harlow looked as though they were wearing skin tight gloves that went up to the middle of the forearm.

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They held their hands out, away from their clothes and felt the dye as it dried on their skin and left it feeling dusty.

"That," Xannie said, pointing one of his stained hands at the horse, "is my ticket out of here. Thank God. I've heard there are piles of rice in America and that there is a Malaysian pediatrician in Chicago. Is this true?"

"I guess so," said Harlow. "I don't know much about doctors, though. It could be true. Is there some place to wash?"

Xannie pointed to the back of the warehouse, and when Harlow walked to the cold water tap there and turned it on, Xannie said, "And what about Dutch and Parisian women? What will they do for money?" but Harlow had already turned the tap on, and didn't hear. He washed his hands and arms, seeing the white, cold lather turn grey and then swirl down the stone sink.

When Harlow came back, he found another piece of paper on the same upturned box. This paper was heavier, and the printing was better, and there was a fine scroll around the edges of it. It looked a little like a certificate of stock, and at the top there was a description of a grey, three year old thoroughbred. The breeding was given, too, and it didn't look very distinguished.

"Where did you get the papers?" said Harlow.

Xannie blinked.

"They came from a long way away," said Xannie. "It's safe for us to use them here."

They put the empty packages of dye into the sack Harlow had used to bring them from the store. Xannie said he'd burn them in the alley. It was still early in the day, and Harlow said he'd get to the track and look around for a jockey. Then he went back to the corner and found a taxi.

In the evening, two hours after the last race, Harlow returned with Harry Laue. He was dark, overweight for a jockey, and a little drunk. Harlow opened the door of the warehouse, and Laue stepped in. Xannie was feeding the horse from a bucket. There were some carrots, too, and Xannie held them up, one at a time, and pushed them between the opened lips, and the regular, moving, and faintly curved teeth. Laue stepped up to

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the animal, went over it, and said to himself, as he touched the muscles, the neck, the legs of the thing, "Well, well, well. . . ."

"What do you think?" said Harlow.

"I got two thousand in the bank," said Laue. "I'm getting it out." Then Laue went back to the horse, his small, calloused hands going over it again, and from the dim place where he bent down, Harlow and Xannie heard his half-sober chuckling. "That two thousand was for leaving town. Can you imagine what it would be like to be trapped here?" He went back to chuckling again, his fingers now carefully going over the horse's legs.

Two days later the horse was entered in the eighth race at Ipoh. Harlow and Xannie walked around the track, feeling the excitement in the air. They drank scotch and soda in tall glasses. Xannie had a pair of dark glasses, and he took them from his pocket and put them on and looked around, and then took them off, fiddling with them while he drank long swallows. Xannie had three hundred dollars and Harlow had nine hundred. They found two chairs and sat in front of the tote board, their faces blank and bored. When the first prices went up the horse was listed at fifty to one, and when, before the race, the price went to ninety-nine to one, Harlow and Xannie bought two more drinks and went to the windows, where there were long lines of people, Malaysian, Chinese, even English and Americans, not to mention a lot of French, all figuring on forms with a bit of pencil and looking over their shoulders through the smoky air, seemingly expecting that someone or at least some news was coming up behind them.

Harlow and Xannie waited in separate lines. Harlow stood in his dress whites, looking clean and young among the other bettors. At the side of the windows there were people lying on the ground or leaning against the wooden planks of a fence there. Many of them had only one leg, and they sat with their crutches (the top covered with a rag) leaning behind them, and there was a woman who had a leg so large that it must have weighed as much as the rest of her. There were children there too, and two of them were blind. They sat together touching

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each other's face and smiling. There were men who had no teeth, and one who had a long, white scar that ran from his hairline to the top of his shirt. It looked as though someone had taken a brush axe and had tried to cut him in half with it. He sat with the others at the fence and watched those who collected on a winning ticket.

Xannie came to the window, and stood opposite the clerk. He took the three hundred dollars from his pocket, and then stood there for a moment. The clerk told him to hurry up. Xannie first put only ten dollars onto the counter, but then he hesitated, wondering if there was any possibility that the horse's leg would hold up for the entire race. It was problematical: the vet was good with horses and was usually right about things like this, but then there was the possibility that the leg might hold up until the horse had crossed the finish line. And what then? Xannie stood at the counter for a moment. Then he split the three hundred dollars in half, betting a hundred and fifty on the horse and putting the rest in his pocket, patting it there as he did so and keeping his eyes on the men and women who leaned against the fence.

Before the race, as the horses were led to the gate, the grey being put into the first position, Xannie said, "What if the horse wins? How are we going to get the cash out of here?"

Harlow opened the jacket of his dress whites and inside there was a service .45 automatic in a holster, which was worn high and to one side. Harlow left his jacket unbuttoned, not because he cared so much about the pistol showing, but because he wanted to be able to get to it easily.

It seemed as though the grey horse came out of the gate a length ahead. And at a distance, as the horses ran from the gate along the long backstretch of the six furlong race, Harlow and Xannie saw the odd, sea-like and gentle movement of the horse as it seemed to stretch out and lift off the track a little, moving faster than even they had hoped. Before the turn it was five lengths ahead and still gaining, its tail out and flying, its mane out like a flag, too, as Laue tried to rein the grey horse back a little, since even at Ipoh there were some standards to worry about.

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In the turn it looked as though the horse was going too fast to make it. More than anything else, there seemed to be a momentary straightness in its path, a tangent that, if followed, would take it to the fence. The people in the stands were already standing and screaming, but, in the moment the horse seemed to step out from the path it should take, the screams changed to a long, deep groan. The horse continued to go straight, although not for long. It dipped a shoulder and then turned a quick, high cartwheel, in which Laue and his tack and the horse's mane and tail blended together. The circular motion of the animal and the color of it appeared for the briefest instant, like a puff of smoke from an explosion, a light, streaming collection of grey on grey, with a boot, a stirrup, a hand, or a bit of silk, a sharp hoof flashing into the clear air and then disappearing again into the confusion. The horse hit the ground, rolled over, and tried to get up, but didn't.

Harlow walked through the crowd, and Xannie hung onto his jacket, which pulled him along until they came to the rail. Harlow jumped over and began running across the soft, loamy soil of the track, which was deep and made the long run seem dream-like and difficult. Harlow crossed the infield grass, and as he went, the people from the stands came behind him, the crowd of them spreading into a large V.

Laue was standing and looking at the horse when Harlow arrived, and for a moment, while the horse pawed the ground and tried to get up, falling each time it put weight on the broken leg, its head rising and sinking with the effort and the pain, Harlow and Laue looked at each other until Laue said, "It'll have to be killed." And as Xannie came running ahead of the crowd which streamed across the infield, as the stewards drove in a Chevrolet pick-up truck from the side of the track where the grandstand was, Harlow took the .45 pistol from under his coat and stood before the horse and shot it between the eyes, once, and then again, and the horse gently and slowly put its nose onto the soft loam of the track. As the horse lay still, the crowd arrived, Xannie at its head.

Xannie stood on the side of the horse opposite Harlow and wailed, throwing his arms into the air, crying openly. Harlow

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stood with blood on his dress whites, still holding the pistol. People crowded around him, looked at the horse and then were pushed aside by others, who were talking quickly and screeching, gesticulating, showing with their hands how the horse had gone straight and then turned end over end. Xannie screamed at Harlow, now speaking not English but a Chinese or Malaysian dialect Harlow understood not at all. A young man in a blue work shirt with a tie said to Harlow, "He wants the gun."

"Why?" said Harlow.

The young man spoke so quickly that his cheeks seemed to flutter.

"He wants to shoot himself," said the man in the workshirt.

Xannie stood on the other side of the horse, one hand out, the other making gestures toward his open palm. The crowd around the horse made a sea-like muttering, a slight, endless babble. Harlow put the pistol into the holster and said, "No. Tell him to come along."

Xannie stood on the other side of the horse, palm still out, his cheeks marked with tears.

"All right," said Harlow, "Tell him I'll take him to America."

The man in the work shirt shouted, opening his mouth so wide as to make a web of his cheek when he spoke. Xannie stared at Harlow. Then he spoke in the language Harlow didn't understand.

"What's that?" said Harlow.

"He wants to know if it will be by boat or airplane," said the man in the workshirt.

Xannie and Harlow stared at one another, and as they did so, with the crowd around them, it began to rain. The sky was purplish, dark. The clouds had no texture. Instead they came in one piece, only marked by the perfect, silver lines of rain. Harlow and Xannie both stared at the horse, and in the heavy rain they saw that the water running from it was getting a little dark, and that when it streamed into the red soil of the track, it left black marks that reminded Harlow of a woman's cheeks when her mascara began to run. The stewards began to look at it, too. Then Xannie climbed over the horse and said, in his crisp, accented English, "It's all right. I'll take the boat."

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They turned and pushed through the crowd and walked through the heavy mud of the track, their feet becoming large and misshapen with it, their fingers and knees still trembling as they went toward the greyish grandstand with its web-like supports, and as they went by the rail there was a man standing against it. He was bald, heavy, wore a dark suit made in England, and his skin was an olive-brown. His eyes were green. He was a little drunk and he had been crying, but now he said, his voice watery and sibilant, while looking at Xannie, "Carrés d'agneau, Truites de rivière de grillées, Homard à la crème. L'argent pour les femmes."

Roast young lamb, grilled trout, lobsters in cream. Money for the women.

They continued walking, and the crowd closed in around them, obscuring the track, the grass of it, the white rail, and making a sound like running water, but as they went, there still came over the noise of the crowd the steady, half drunk voice of Pierre, as he shouted, "Salmon glacé à la Parisienne!"

Glazed salmon!

"Wait a minute," said Xannie, and then he went to the rail, where Pierre stood. Xannie said, "I'll tell you if there is a Malaysian pediatrician in Chicago."

Pierre nodded, and put his arms around Xannie, hugged him, and then gave Xannie a polite, Gallic kiss on each cheek.

"Who's he?" said Harlow.

"Another drunk gambler," said Xannie.

Then they walked along the track, passing the high, dark stands, the supports of them, the umbrella-like gussets at the top of each post, the almost gloomy space under the roof, where people sat, wearing dark glasses and waiting for the next race to begin, and they passed, too, the blind children who played with the features of one another's face.

I first heard this story years ago, when I was having dinner at Harlow's house. Xannie hadn't been in the country long, and Harlow had moved into his father's house and brought Xannie to live there. Harlow was already inviting to dinner some local political . . . allies, and one of them asked Xannie what

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he would have done if Harlow had passed over the pistol, but Xannie only blinked at the man and then said, "Don't you think it's nice here in America?"

After a while I was able to find a time to be alone with Xannie and then I asked him in a mild, friendly, and sympathetic tone, how long he had waited in the warehouse for Harlow to come along.

Xannie stared at me full in the face and said, "Have you ever been to Malaysia?"

It came out slowly. Every now and then, when I saw Xannie, he'd mention Pierre Bouteille, the stables, the x-rays of the horse, the papers. He knew that once he had the horse, all he had to do was to sit tight: the right American would come along. There were a lot of us in Ipoh at the time. I don't know why. And, of course, no American can resist fixing a horse race. We're fascinated by these things. In the Orient, Xannie said, things are more ordinary. He once had a ticket for a horse winning a race in Malaysia, and when he went to cash it the clerk slammed the window shut, saying that although Xannie had the winning ticket, the horse wasn't supposed to win. Xannie had almost formed a partnership with an enlisted man from Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, but at the last moment he backed out, since the enlisted man didn't look like he had the money for a trip to America. Xannie waited for Harlow to put his head in the door.

Xannie had been certain, too, that no American in the world would let him use the pistol on himself. He had been waiting for the moment when an American would stop him. Xannie had banked on it. If you figured this out, he became your friend.

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Permanent Parisians

Judi Culbertson and Tom Randall

> I seldom go out, but when I feel myself flagging I go and cheer myself up in Père Lachaise . . . while seeking out the dead I see nothing but the living.
>
> Honoré De Balzac

Paris is famous for her cuisine, her art treasures, and her general cachet, but perhaps less well known for her necrography. Yet nothing illustrates the slender line between life and death as well as the cemeteries of Paris. Stone figures start up from their beds as if hearing a noise, or dance as if they had been turned to marble without warning. To visit them is to be struck with wonder.

Yet there is little depressing about French cemeteries. Although the three or four hundred cats of Père Lachaise lie low during the day, its passages are alive with gateskeepers, picnickers, and tourists looking for famous names. Such names are around every corner. Here you may find Chopin, there Gertrude Stein. Those buried in Père Lachaise alone include Marcel Proust, Oscar Wilde, Sarah Bernhardt, Isadora Duncan, Auguste Comte, Georges Seurat, Edith Piaf, and Héloïse and Abélard.

Across town in Montmartre lie Impressionist Edgar Degas and writers Alexandre Dumas (fils), Heinrich Heine, and Émile Zola. Further south in Montparnasse Cemetery are such recent arrivals as Jean Seberg and Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as comparative old-timers like de Maupassant, Saint-Saëns, and Alfred Dreyfus.

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From the tombs of the early kings, Childéric and Dagobert, to the mass graves of the victims of the French Revolution, the history of France has been carved in stone. The following photographs and accompanying texts are from a book, Permanent Parisians: An Illustrated Guide to the Cemeteries of Paris, *to be published this spring by the Chelsea Green Publishing Company of Vermont. The selection focuses on the notable writers who, by accident or design, have remained in Paris—permanently.*

Several writers could not be located: Richard Wright, who is supposedly buried somewhere in Père Lachaise and Rabelais who, like Mozart's mother, was interred in a churchyard which has since vanished. A gravesite shared by Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, their names engraved on either side of a stone monument (Stein featured on the front, Toklas on the back), was in such disrepair as to warrant exclusion.

In Europe an interest in cemeteries is not regarded as morbid or unnatural. On November first and second, thousands of Parisians flock to Père Lachaise to celebrate All Saints Day and the Day of the Dead. Much French funerary sculpture is designed to be appreciated (as well as to give a warning or impart a private joke). The French also find inspiration in pausing at the grave of someone long admired and leaving flowers there.

The Paris cemeteries represented by the portfolio include Père Lachaise, Montmartre, Montparnasse, and the Pantheon.

Although neither **La Fontaine** (1621–1695) nor **Molière** (1622–1673) were originally buried in Père Lachaise, chances are they would have been pleased by the change. Born only a year apart, they were close friends. Molière's original burial had been clandestine. Because actors were denied a Christian burial, it had taken the influence of Louis XIV to have him reinterred one hundred and forty-four years later—and only on the condition that it be done at night, without a ceremony. La Fontaine's original gravesite, in a churchyard, was demolished and he was moved.

La Fontaine's tomb has characters from his fables in bronze on the sides. Molière's is a simple stone canopy.

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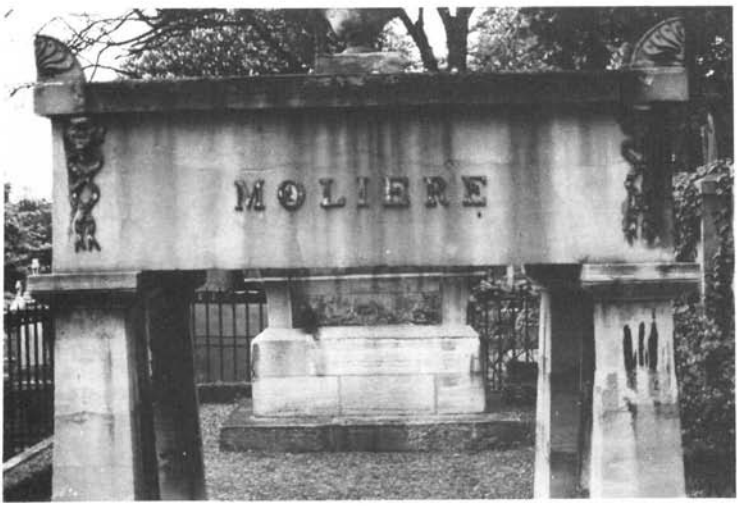

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Voltaire (Francois-Marie Arouet) (1694–1778) Embalmed and dressed as if he were still alive, Voltaire was propped up in his carriage and taken to the Abbey of Seillieres where his nephew, Abbé Mignot, and a gathering of priests gave him a Christian burial. Church leaders in Paris protested but he was allowed to remain there until the Revolution. At that point, as the man who had written, "If a man has tyrants he must overthrow them," Voltaire was proclaimed a hero and reburied in the Panthèon. Actually, very little of him is left. His heart, a foot, two teeth and his "unusually large brain" were all stolen at various times as private relics. His bones were alleged to have been removed from here in 1814 by religious extremists. As was pointed out with unconscious accuracy by a relative at his Panthéonization, "His spirit is everywhere."

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Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle) (1783–1842) Stendhal died of a stroke at fifty-nine, a well-known writer but relatively unmourned. In contrast to the thousands that usually joined the cortege of the famous, only three friends followed his coffin to Montmartre. Instead of being buried in Rome beside Shelley (as he had wanted) he was laid to rest at the rear of the cemetery, in the shadow of the viaduct bridge. Yet after he died, his reputation improved. In 1905 a committee was formed to erect a memorial to him with a sculpture by Rodin based on a medallion by David D'Angers. In 1962 he was moved out of the viaduct's shadow and placed in the sunshine of the main road.

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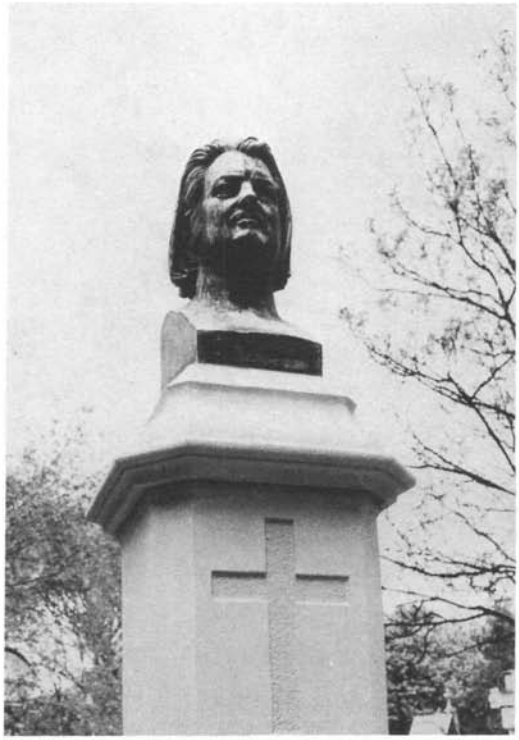

Honoré De Balzac (1799–1850) Balzac died only five months after his marriage to Eveline Hanski, a wealthy Polish countess with whom he had been in love for sixteen years. The marriage was the fulfillment of some of his dreams, for he had gained love and wealth. But his heart, long weak, grew worse, and his body deteriorated. With great plans for many more volumes of his series, *La Comédie Humaine*, he died at the age of fifty-one.

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Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) Probably a result of syphilis, Heine suffered a gradual paralysis of the face and as his body gave way he spent his last eight years on his "mattress grave." Throughout this torturous ordeal he worked, entertained visitors, and retained his famed wit. Lifting a paralyzed eyelid in order to see the dim outline of a visitor he remarked afterwards, that "Alexander Weill came to see me. We exchanged ideas and now I'm utterly stupid." Or, as his nurse easily lifted his husk of a body to the window for a view he quipped, "See how the people of Paris carry me on their shoulders!" On his death bed he threatened to refer God to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He was a writer to the end. His last words were "Paper and pencil!"

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Charles-Pierre Baudelaire (1821–1867) The cenotaph of Charles-Pierre Baudelaire by Jose de Charmoy depicts the poet brooding over a gauze-encased body.

In the year before his death, Baudelaire, resting in a nursing home and left all but mute from advanced syphilis, nevertheless enjoyed some respite from his deepening depression. He took special pleasure in his many visitors, in Berthe Morisot's playing Wagner on the piano, and in the numerous flowers which grew in the yard outside the home. His condition also allowed his mother, Caroline, one last chance to play a maternal role and thereby attempt a long overdue reconciliation. According to his mother, Baudelaire died with a smile on his lips.

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Writer **Théophile Gautier** (1811–1872), author of the brilliant novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, was also an outstanding poet to whom Baudelaire dedicated *Les Fleurs du mal*. On his grave stands the muse of epic poetry, Calliope, who appears to be headed for dinner with a duck, a loaf of French bread and Gautier's medallion under her arm.

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Marie d'Agoult (1805–1876) wrote novels as Daniel Stern. On her tomb, a small head of Goethe, one of her lovers, hovers in the background with a worried expression. Her best-known liaison, however, was with Franz Liszt. One of their three children, Cosima, married composer Richard Wagner.

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Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893) The irony which Maupassant so richly portrayed in his work pursued him to the grave. In his will Maupassant had requested to be buried without a coffin so that his remains might better mingle with nature; instead, he was interred in a triple box of oak, pine and zinc. A confirmed skeptic, he was given a religious burial. And, though there was no estrangement from them, his parents did not attend. Perhaps he would have approved of his bier—a railed-in planting of shrubs with an open book above them.

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Alexandre Dumas fils (1824–1895) The fils (meaning "son of"), always tagged to the end of his name like tin cans on the tail of a cat, branded Alexandre as the afterthought of a more successful father. Until he was six he lived with his mother, Catherine Labay, and was largely ignored by his famous father. Then Dumas père, in a fit of conscience, went to court to establish paternity and, after a custody battle, brought Alexandre to live with him and his latest mistress. When that did not work out, the unhappy child was sentenced by the Court to boarding school.

Dumas fils, more withdrawn because of his early unhappiness, lacked his father's boisterous *joie de vivre* but copied Dumas père's extravagant lifestyle and love affairs. They allegedly shared mistresses and traded boasts; to someone who commiserated with him over having such a father, Alexandre answered, "At least, if he doesn't set me a good example, he provides me with an excellent excuse."

Alexandre also wanted to write—though his father tried to discourage him, grumbling that if he had had any inkling of it beforehand he would never have allowed him have the same name. Dumas fils produced thirteen forgettable novels and some bad poetry before his successful *La Dame aux camélias.* Generous and sociable though with a cutting wit, Alexandre was elected to the Acadèmie Française before his father and given the Legion of Honor. His father (author of *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*) is buried northeast of Paris in Villers-Cotterêts.

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Paul-Marie Verlaine (1844–1896) Beauty and the Beast. Remarkably ugly in feature and habit, Paul Verlaine nevertheless produced poetry of extraordinary beauty despite a life of drink, violence, and promiscuity whose decadent excess and unceasing self-destruction has rarely been matched. Once arriving late and loudly drunk for a dinner party, Verlaine caused Apollinaire to weep at the waste of his genius.

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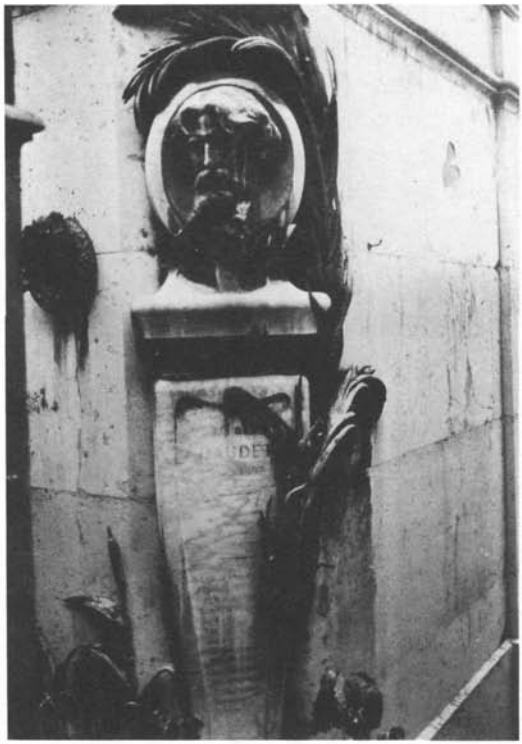

Alphonse Daudet (1840–1897). Although a famous author in his time, Daudet has fallen into obscurity in the twentieth century, a fact that his tomb rather eerily predicts. A visitor must walk around to the back of the Allard and Daudet family mausoleum to find a portrait of Alphonse sculpted into one corner. His eyes are averted, as if accepting his fate, and below his cameo are listed his works, including novels *The Little Good-For-Nothing* (1868), *Jack* (1876), *The Nabob* (1877) and *The Immortal* (1888).

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Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), After a wait of nine years in Bagneaux Cemetery, Wilde's remains were transferred to Père Lachaise on July 19, 1909. The doctors had advised that he be buried in quicklime to reduce the body to bone before transfer. Instead, the substance had preserved him, shocking the gravediggers; his hair and beard had even grown longer. It took Jacob Epstein three years to sculpt his monument, which represents the poet as a winged messenger. When Epstein arrived to put the finishing touches on the statue, he found it shrouded and guarded by a *gendarme*; the cemetery conservateur had found it "indecent" and had had it banned.

Officials refused to bow to public intellectual pressure until an acceptable alteration was made—a plaque serving as a fig leaf. The tomb was unveiled in 1914, but by 1922 students in nocturnal raids had hacked away the fig leaf as well as a substantial portion of what lay beneath. A richer story is that two English women, offended at Wilde's being portrayed as so well-endowed, committed the emasculation themselves. The conservateur, on finding the parts at the base, is supposed to have used them as paperweights.

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Emile Zola (1840–1902) In good health and spirits, certain of the glowing future that science would bring, the man Anatole France would call "a moment of the conscience of man" died of asphyxiation from a blocked chimney in his bedroom. The deathbed confession many years later of a laborer who had been working on a nearby rooftop just before it happened, raised suspicion that the blockage was a successful assassination attempt on Zola by the anti-Dreyfusards. But sufficient evidence did not exist to prove it. Six years after his death reactionaries and anti-Dreyfusards tried to block the transfer of Zola's remains from Montmartre to the Panthèon with manifestos, demonstrations, and, finally violence.

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Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918) The tall and dignified stele, engraved with several stanzas of Apollinaire's poetry and a calligram in the shape of a valentine and captioned "*Mon coeur pareil a une flamme renversée*" ("My heart is like an everlasting fire") might call to mind a slender neurasthenic romantic. The anonymous roses left regularly on his grave add to that impression. But the real Apollinaire might have been mistaken for a genial train conductor. Plump from his love of fine cuisine, his pear-shaped head was immortalized many times in drawings by his good friend Picasso: Apollinaire as pope, as clown, as soldier, as gymnast.

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Marcel Proust (1871–1922) Devotees of *Remembrance of Things Past* will surely be disappointed by Proust's grave. As a writer who specialized in emotional minutiae, exquisitely detailing the sunlight on a chest of drawers and cataloguing the emotions that occur just before sleep, he deserves a monument as carved and complicated as a medieval cathedral. In fact, the author's grave is more his father's. The bronze visage on an otherwise plain expanse is Dr. Adrien Proust, one of the foremost doctors of his era, best known for his successful crusade to keep cholera out of France. Marcel's younger brother, Robert, also buried here, was a gynecologist. Marcel also had extensive medical knowledge, but he never practiced. In a family of high achievers, his life seemed as meandering to his parents as his writings did to critics. Proust died attended by his housekeeper and his brother, Robert. With him died the special intensity with which he scrutinized the world. A friend, seeing him laid out, commented, "Marcel looks deader than other dead people." Everyone knew what he meant.

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Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) Sartre's death from kidney failure came at seventy-four. Fifty thousand people followed the hearse to Montparnasse to pay tribute to the author of *Being and Nothingness, The Age of Reason, Nausea, The Flies, No Exit,* and over forty other works. In her memoir *Adieux* Simone de Beauvoir, his lifelong companion, tells of the verbal games they played as students at the University of Paris and how, when one scored a point over the other, the winner would tease, "There you are in your little box!" De Beauvoir wrote, "You are in your little box; you will not come out of it and I will not join you there. Even if I am buried next to you there will be no communication between your ashes and mine." She added: "That is how things are. It is in itself splendid that we were able to live out our lives in harmony for so long."

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Three Poems by Ruth Danon

Vocation

The hardest part is the way the knot at the base of the
neck tightens.
There's a whole body here to hold up the head
but this time
you are tired and you want to lie down. Never
would a gesture
mean so much.

The change is subtler than you expect. You were hoping
for a circus, a pony-ride, the high trapeze.
You wanted a presence,
the sudden rush of arrival. The hardest part comes now,
this discovery of more radical needs than food and shelter.
How to say it? There's hell to pay this time and you know
you'll take anything that's offered.

Lately you've had to develop new uses
for your college education.
Perhaps you had the wrong major after all, should have
stayed in botany
scooping algae out of the river, scraping moss from bark,
mastering
the small details of other life forms.

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There were so many uses for geological science. There was
  such possibility you thought, so many secrets.
  It would have been nice
to read the weather with some intelligence, to know
  a mackerel sky
when you see one.

I know this much:
nothing sufficient has yet been said about stone:
its weight, its mass, its edge,
its impact on bone.

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Refugee

I have a trigger for you, a bus stop, a way out.
I have a gift for you, a list in my hand.
The weather is always accurate because the mind just
moves that way.
Waiting in the station I admire the multiple varieties of
provincial life.
I'm red boots in the rain, a muffled alarm.

I make a living, I get along. I write tickets all the time
and turn them in for things.
I've got an oven, a toaster, a house for birds.

You're always hungry, yes I can make soup, yes we can eat.
The kitchen tilts. Your dumb fists shift in their pockets.
You've turned on a dime, proud of your skill.
I'm mud at the edge of water.
The wind is moving fast. Yes, we can take a walk.

You have no scarf, no gloves, no excuse.
My shoes are crooked with salt; I cannot help you anymore.
That one cries rags, that one sells hearts.
I'm telling you there's no end to it.
I have a map for you, a trigger, a sudden urge.

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Keeping Track

Distance to distance. The sound of
thunder, a train, recedes to the west.
Your hand running the length of my arm.
There is no beginning to an action.
You touch me, the sheet, your own
shoulders. We make love, seamless,
successful as the illusion of cinema.
"We have always been here," you tell me.
There we were. I am in a café
in New York in early spring.
"Coffee please." Afternoon to evening.
You are buying film in Columbus.
Distance to distance. I call
person to person. "Where does she sleep?"
"Will she be warm?" I was concerned.
"Here or there," you say, hugging
the phone or begging the question.

In San Antonio there were showers
of butterflies, monarchs bursting
the blue air with light. When I tell you
you remember the sun on the mountains,
exactly that color. I was surrounded
by butterflies and you were alone
on a mountain.

I lie down in a dark room.
Distance is nothing but time spelled out.
We were a film. We walked everywhere
in your camera. You are coming up
the stairs. I am waiting for you.
In bed we smoke cigarettes with the
simple dignity of lovers about to be
serious. The smoke curls. It is
spring, summer, winter, fall.
The sheets are blue. They are clean.

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We do not enter the bedroom. The
camera was there, is here. We sit
at a table. We are smoking cigarettes.
My mind is light as a naked body.
We are exploding the blue air
with our bright thoughts. Only
the sequence suggests change. We
shoot it again. You are mounting
the stairs. I am counting
the necessary objects. The kitchen
table won't fit the frame.
The light is different in the evening.
I am waiting for a knock at the door.
I let you in. The table in the room.
The light in the evening.
Imagine a lie that unfolds
like a fan or a scream. The
objects are the same. The scene
unfolds like a fan and a scream.
One night dreaming I could
no longer touch you, I awoke,
stayed silent, shivered until
morning. I fold you in my arms.
I unfold you. I am the shutter's eye.

You brush back the hair
from her face. She lies beside
you on the blue sheets in that
other room. I am a tree in
your yard. You are the wind
absent in the hour before the
hurricane. Everything has
already happened. There will be
a storm. What will she do when you
go into the yard to look at the tree?
There is the silence after thunder.
There is the wait for rain.

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Here has a name. There was
another place. Your name is
Michael. My name is Ruth.
Distance is distance. Ohio
is not New York. New York is
not California. California
is not Texas. A wooden house
is not a café on Third Avenue.
Once we met, we loved each other.
You ran your hand along the blue
vein in my arm. We made love
in the basement of a blue house.
Often there were stairs. There was
a door I opened many times.
There were trees with shadows
and wine in clear glasses. You
were from California. I was
from New York. There was
May and June and July.
There was a night and a
morning and a long afternoon.
We will die someday. The
camera needs film. Here
is a beginning. There is
a meal that ends, a storm that
passes; here is a tree
that sheds its leaves.

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Three Poems by Brad Gooch

H.

This is for you
Now that your curved wood chair
like a chair carved in Black Woods, Germany,
is gathering the silvery daylight in places,
silvery because screened first through sheets of plastic
you put over the windows to keep the heat in, in winter,
and now the whole scene is changing, I mean birds and short
orange jackets, sneaks, little pink stickers on the trees,
that open up in most places into fancy flowers, amaryllis,
for instance, to me just a fancy name for girl in antique poems,
I actually saw in a rich man's house the other day, in vase,
its wild pink and yellow aspects, like the hands of a child Buddha,
waving at me and at him, while we chattered through scattered topics,
he was telling me how, in Buddhism, there are five families,
which are like the astrological houses, you remind me
sometimes of one house, in which the occupant is very bland,
like a clod of earth that just sits there, we call a bump on a log,
"dull" was the word, a word you use about yourself,
but then I know too you are like a kicking horse,
a horse that kicks that very dull clod into the pale blue forever,
hoofing and snorting, trying to get things started,
trying, almost to rush things, to kick the flowers into beauty,

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getting all kinds of scratches, it is not your voice
that gets me moving, it is everything about you, your voice
one of the least striking lines of all, but a swish, like a tail,
but I hate all these symbols, fire, air, water, they bother
me,
I mean I drink water, I know dirty air when I see it,
like in Mestre, is that the name, Italy, across the dirty
industrial
canals, now that we have conquered swamps we remake
them in the air,
and fire, fire is what you make dexterously in our dangerous
fireplace, when it gets cold and we drink and talk, politely,
as though we were just introduced by the lamp to one
another,
this *is* love, when it comes down to it, a bowl of porridge
here,
a few words of advice on income tax loopholes, and later,
when the swans and geese have sunk under the pink lakes
of the South,
when this chair is up in final smoke, and I have not yet
said it,
you and I, we will still be trying to say it in other ways,
which is, finally, the best way, like saying Amaryllis,
when you don't mean that gorgeous hunk of fragile flower,
but mean an old girl sitting in the fertile rain, humming
to death.

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Rip Tide

Am not sure what it is
In oceanography
how the tide just tears apart

In people
one day you're seamless
and the next day
you begin to tear and shred
not in a bad way
but because you met somebody
and the swirl
that had been set
into hard candy
is moving again
the rivulets of fudge
ooze and loosen up
you begin to get gooey
and feel scared.

Seasons.
People have no seasons
there is no time chart
like the tide chart they post
down by the beach
looks like the Long Island Railroad timetable.

You grew up by a beach
and under its boardwalk
saw the red hairs
the redhead's wang
bigger than usual
yours still little
maybe that's why you're gay
you say.

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I notice
when you say gay
you put a curve into it
not like in baseball
the curve hidden from the camera
by the striped ass of the pitcher
but a curve that arches down
a rocket that is launched bravely up into the sky
and then comes down with a moan
into the humongous ocean
Like when you say you are gay
cuz you were left on the bottle too long
or was it taken off too soon
and now this latest lightbulb-in-head:
gay because your stick got its proportions
late in life
long after the sex had set
like a candy
that is hard
but sweet
and sold at the shore
not North maybe
—you're from Silver Springs—
but South
South New Jersey.

Yet
It is because you think
answers
to questions
that I like you.
I remember the night we met
what really caught the ear
of my heart
was when that time you said
Richard Speck
how did the nurse feel under the bed
and not two seconds later

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you were considering
a fat woman in Virginia
convicted to electric chair
She was the one who poisoned her hubbie son mommie dog
just to make them sick, she claimed, not to stiff them.
Now she's born again.
A little late, you think, with all the dead
stiff under ground.
She walks over them on her way to the Court House.

I wanted to talk about rip tide
about why it was
well no I did not after all
I wanted to tell you that
the reason I like you so far is
how you say It
whatever It is at the time.
(Me, I let the cat in, and the fog out.)
And then that time you said that Michael
the husband or boyfriend of the woman or girl or friend
who hemmed your pants for you the other night
that he was not gay,
I said he was,
You helpfully explained that it was just that he has feelings
feelings that blush on his skin.

You have feelings on your skin, too.
And a stick
in your heart.
All for Now.

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Church Music

Tomás Luis de Victoria
moves very slow
in his motet
addressed, like a postcard
perfectly square,
to the angels,
sung, on the recording, on the radio,
by a group of men
in our time
who are married to God:
I think the men too
should wear rings
like nuns
to enlist
into a military service
baroque
which makes sense
rather than nonsense
out of what matters.

What matters
to Victoria
is the motet
which is just a whistle
perhaps
compared to Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina
("The Palace")
in whose masses
you could hear—according to contemporary reports—
along those marble notes
the dove wings
flapping
like the pigeon who rests
in a dark day
on the ledge of my window

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but then is scared away
abruptly
by my clatter
the announcer's voice
goes on
about the angels . . . ooops . . .
now the Holy Trinity . . .
and dates and dedications
I would rather not hear right now
not that I don't love scholarship
more than the next man
and know that as the elbow is just a right angle
without the knees below
and the heart just a red pond
without the eyes for lightning towers
so our time
and our sound (new)
must be heard too with the older music
of Victoria and Palestrina.
Forget
where they studied together
the day is too dark
and my confusion about when to call you back
if ever
too
—oh shut up, I can't feel a thing—
I am hysterical
to have lost you
you were like a motet to my ears
and here, at the so-so age of 31,
I have settled to be part of an unwieldy
special festal Mass
decked-out
with blasting trumpets
whose sounds settle in the stone balustrades
(trapped)
of the forehead.

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Never do the shoulders sag
no more
sitting here in the choir
and never do the highest voices
of the pre-teens
reach
as they do
and you did
the lowest places
in my
(still devoted to you)
contraption.

Notate, pleeeze,
those highs and lows for me
oh anonymous composer
I won't tell.

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Four Poems by Joyce Carol Oates

Winter Wrath

My anger is such that the very ice-fields would melt,
if I had the power.
If I had the power.

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Winter Boredom

The pocked face masked over—
these old, old landscapes now "new."
Winter is a white fiction heaped upon another.

How appropriate then to celebrate
in dirge-music,
flat dead syllables tasteless as pebbles on the tongue:
The pocked face masked over.

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Winter Threnody

After twenty hours the snowfall stopped
without our noticing.

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Winter Love

The roofs of all the neighborhoods sagged with snow,
the chimneys of all the roofs were clogged,
snow sifted fine as sand in all the corners.
All the marriages were entombed,
snug and blind as burrows.

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Three Poems by Sarah Plimpton

the door is open
like the night outside
I'll stand to walk
as if the roads
are already paved
but the stars
are underneath

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you opened the door
but the face was at the night
you would see the stars
when you turn to leave
the small earth
you dug up
is buried again
tied up in its knot and
the sky was left inside

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you had seen where
the sky is torn
the small pieces
are blue
the eye is scattered
its fine dust would disappear
and the light has gone

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Three Poems by N. Scott Momaday

The Hotel 1829

For An Painter

Dusk—and the shimmer on the sea
has quickened and gone still. The large,
lithe Hurricane birds soar in circles
beyond the bay, and filmy flamboyants
stand on the green embankment wavering.

A goat saunters in the street. Its eyes
gleam in the headlamps like amber
held up to the moon. Curious,
seeming not to see, they remain
in the afterwards. She finds them
in the wine, the bright crystal
at her place.

The glitter on the fog is rain;
the rainy reach, the long beach curves
out on the gloss, the vault of lights.
She sees oysters shining in their shells.
Her hand on the hard linen, in candlelight,
expresses her.

In a reflected arc the goat's eyes,
in the goat's eyes a random will—and
the late, faint shimmer on the sea.

Great white ships roll in the harbor, illumined
and gracious to the night, their ornaments
burn on the blur beyond the Hotel 1829.

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Concession

Believe the sullen sense that sickness made,
And broke you in its hands.

Believe that death inhabits the mere shade
Intimacy demands.

I drink, my love, to your profound disease;
Its was the better suit.

I could not have provided you this ease,
Nor this peace, absolute.

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Sonnet for a Mottled-Breasted Girl

Forgive me, it is what I made of you
In squalls, in Mardi Gras and ballyhoo.

I am not pretty, and my tits, she said,
Are small and freckled, and my mind is dead.

Forgive me, it is what I made of fate
In faith and confidence. I celebrate

Your deceased mind, your spare and speckled chest;
You are the kind of girl that I like best,

For I have found you loyal to my trust,
To Church and State, and ample to my lust.

There is no deceit in my soul, she said;
I have not lied to you, I'm deadly dead.

I've seen hens' eggs the image of your breasts,
Spotted as March moons in their yellow nests.

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Portfolio

Two Drawings:

Study for Drawing with
Handle on it
&
Plaster Cast of an Ear
and a Picture Hook
1985

Michael Hurson

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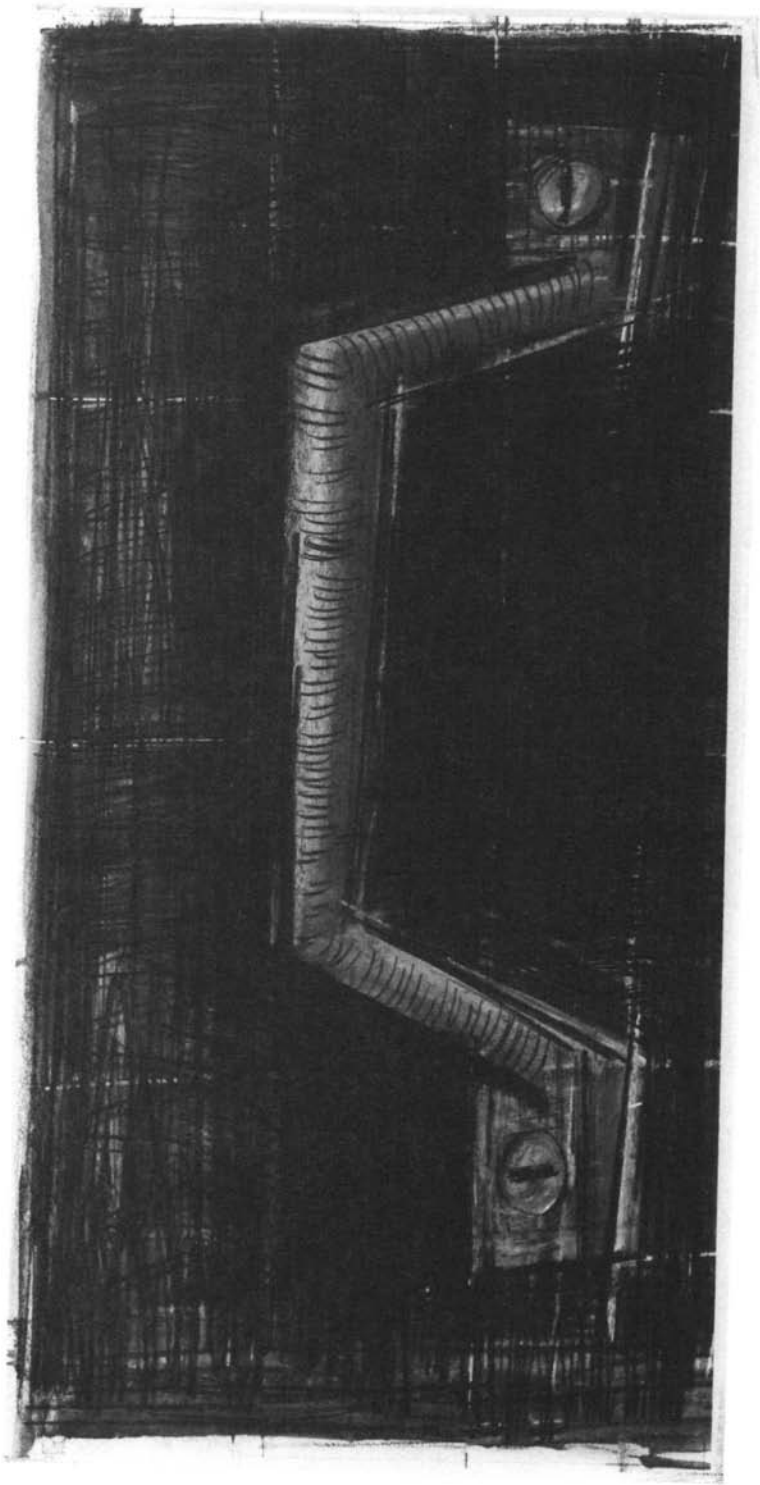

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Mary Barnard

Song for the Northern Quarter

1

The sun is a drum
the moon is a cymbal
The flow of time is caught in a cup.

Cupful by
cupful by
cupful time
is cut; if not,
we should choke.

By night in the northern quarter the Dipper
or Northern Ladle or Bushel Measure
turns like the hand of a clock measuring time
although no punctuating tick or tock
notches its arc, sunset to sunrise.

Its handle divides the year into seasons,
pointing towards earth at dusk in autumn,
upward at dusk in spring, in winter
twilight west, in summer east.

And so it is and was and shall be
but not world without end (and neither
was it so from the world's beginning).

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2

The stars of the northern sky revolve
in a circle dance, but slowly, slowly
(serpent mating with tortoise). The round
is a carol, revolving counter-clockwise
against the sun's apparent motion, as witches
turn with the left hand in, or withershins.

Instead of a ladle, instead of a dance,
a Bear: a lumbering she-bear nosing
the trunk of the cosmic tree. Or again,
the seven sages, the Hindu Rishis,
pace round the cosmic mountain. Instead
of any of these, it may be a plough.
It may be a thigh, or the leg of an ox.

It may be a carriage, a long-tongued cart.
Carol, carolus; it is Charles's Wain,
the cart of Carolus Magnus, Charlemagne.
And in China a chariot again, a triumphal car
for the pole-star god, Shang-ti, with winged attendants.

3

Praying, some face Mecca; some face the East,
the sunrise, the new day dawning, the future.
The Son of Heaven faced north, saluting the pole-star,
his double: the unchanging, unwobbling Center. Planets,
moon and sun and the stars that partner them
all pass from sight and return, but there at the axis
eternity is unmoved and out of time's reach.

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This is the tent-pole of heaven, the shaman's tree
or the ash tree Yggdrasil. Or it may be a deity,
K'uei, for instance, the one-legged dancing master
who twirls on his single foot at the center of space
to set the stars in motion, and time's wheel turning.
Or Siva, dancing the dance of creation.

North
is more than cold. Wherever winter nights
are long and the Dipper wheels high in the sky,
too high for setting, the sovereignty of time
lies with neither sun nor moon: it dwells
in the mysterious core about which time turns.

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Donald Hall

My Friend Felix

"Beginning at five o'clock, just before dawn rises
in the rear-view mirror, I drive at eighty, alone,
all day through Texas. I am a pencil extending
a ruler's line to the unchangeable horizon
west as I repeat a thousand quarrels with my wives.
My grip on the steering wheel slackens; my mind's voice
turns
mild and persuasive, quietly addressing the young
doctor at the detox center . . . But I cannot stop
hearing again, word-for-word, last winter's two o'clock
call from a motel in Albany—she would not say
where she was—as my daughter wept, sighed, begged
forgiveness,
and allowed the telephone to drop from her fingers.
When I have driven straight through daylight, five-foot
neon
letters rise crimson in the pale west: BAR. Thirty years
drown: I am a young man again driving with Felix
from New Haven to San Diego where he will join
his Crusader and his carrier, and in two months
overshoot the runway and slide to the Pacific's
silt bottom without jettisoning his canopy,
while a helicopter hovers an hour above him.
For a moment Felix sits alongside me again,
a young man forever, with his skin wrinkled and puffed
from thirty years of soaking in his watery chair:

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All day we drove west on a ruled highway: at a BAR
we swallowed two pitchers, and back on the road again
I pulled out to pass a tractor-trailer. Another
approached and neither truck would give way; I labored
past
the semi inch-by-inch and at the last half-second
sideslipped in front. As our pulses slowed we stared ahead,
and from the slipcovered seat beside me Felix spoke:
'The time that we lose by stopping to drink we make up
by drunken driving.' Continuing straight west I dream
of my lucky friend Felix the singlewing halfback."

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David Trinidad

Great-Grandmother Smith

In the two photographs I have of her,
taken over ten years apart, she wears
the same plain dress. In the first,
she sits in the sun (under a parasol)
next to her daughter, Marguerite, my
mother's mother, whose smile is warm,
while Great-grandmother's is stiff
beneath spectacles. Her white hair
is pinned tight. Her figure is slight,
almost skeletal. In the second picture,
she stands alone on the front steps
of the house on W. Montecito Street
in Sierra Madre, where we visited her
when I was a child. I remember little
but details of those infrequent trips:
the dense oleanders that fenced her
yard from the neighbors', a wobbly
stepladder my brother and I reached
for ripe apricots and plums from,
the knee-high weeds we romped through
out back. The small garage was off
limits; in it, black widows guarded
the steamer trunks stuffed with her
memories—porcelain dolls with vacant
faces, petite high-button shoes, and
the padded velvet family album filled
with photographs of her own great-
grandparents, who migrated from France
to Canada in the mid 1800's, and of
her parents before and after they met
in Cambridge Square, married, and

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moved to Bristol, Connecticut, where
she was born (the first of twelve
children), brought up, and, at the
age of fifteen, handed to a local
watchmaker turned homesteader, who
with his "drunkard of a brother"
raised gamecocks on Chippens Hill,
a farm notoriously popular in the
area for the cockfights often staged
there. Great-grandmother gave birth
to two sons, grew and sold vegetables
door-to-door in town, transplanted
roots to the dirt floor of the cellar
each fall. But the goings-on in the
barn unsettled her and she objected
until, eight months pregnant with
Marguerite, she warned the two men
that, should the drinking, gambling
and fighting not stop, she would one
by one wring their prize roosters'
necks. The ruckus continued and she
did just that. The following day, her
brother-in-law left for more amiable
parts and her husband returned to his
former trade. Years later, after he
came to California and couldn't find
work, he took up gardening. The family
lived in Sierra Madre, on the opulent
estate of Arthur Gerlach, who once
photographed Einstein and the Ford
brothers, and invested wisely in
Detroit Edison's prosperous stock.
By then, Marguerite had blossomed
into a young beauty, was crowned
"Queen of the Wisteria Vines" in
an annual spring festival, fell
in love with Harlan, Mr. Gerlach's
youngest son, to whom she was wed

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in an elaborate ceremony that made
the front page of the city's daily
paper. Their marriage, although it
introduced the Smiths to money and
enabled Great-grandfather to retire
in comfort, ended when my mother
was three—Marguerite left Harlan
as soon as she learned he had lost
everything they owned in a Friday
night poker game. Not long after
the divorce, Harlan died of a burst
appendix and Great-grandfather passed
away in his sleep. He was seventy.
Marguerite got her driver's license,
worked for the telephone company
while Great-grandmother watched after
my mother, waking her early every
Saturday so they could take the Red
Car to Los Angeles, where she'd
rummage through the Goodwill ware-
house and thrift shops on Skid Row
for wool skirts and coats, which
she would lug back in brown paper
bags, split at the seams with razor
blades, picking off the threads,
then soak and wash, steam press,
cut into inch-wide strips that she
folded, stitched together, wound
into balls like yarn, and used to
braid huge oval rugs. That was
before the Second World War, about
the time Marguerite felt the first
symptoms of a disease later diagnosed
as leukemia. The long, drawn out illness
tainted my mother's adolescence, as
did the news that George, her cousin
and childhood companion, was killed
when a Japanese suicide pilot crashed

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into his LST landing craft as it
hauled gasoline off Guadalcanal. He
was seventeen. Marguerite was in her
early thirties when she whispered
"George is calling me" moments before
she died. My mother sat at her side,
dampening her skin. She was fourteen.
Great-grandmother lived to be ninety-
three, although we saw less of her
after she had to be moved to a con-
valescent facility where, heavily
sedated, she simply sat and stared
out the window at passing traffic.
I remember being frightened by the
lady in the next bed because she
mumbled strange things. I was not
quite five, but I can still recall
the living room of her house, how
in its spaciousness I kept myself
silent one Sunday afternoon a month
by counting her spools of colored
thread and lifting the lid of the
piano bench to examine stacks of
faded sheet music. I remember there
were photographs of people I didn't
know above the fireplace and that
I stared up at them as I stared
up at Great-grandmother as she sat
for hours working wool into rugs, her
severe expression matched only by
the intensity with which her fingers
steadfastly braided the fabric.

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Jane Miller

Peace Lyric

In a dream of sex & blindness,
boats grow rare on a river.

In a meteor shower which I feel but can't see
(as I sense there's something in the future

though *I don't feel it*),
the tossing of plums & grapefruit.

At the pole dance at Picuris,
a sheep tied to a pole.

At Santo Domingo, dancemasters & clowns attend a line
of elders & children;

a breeze floats down, an elder escapes with a story in his
hands & feet;
in the morning I learn who was awake.

Arrhythmic beats from turquoise & white deaf & dumb
drums, olive & gold painted,

dark-skinned, when they rest they rest on their sides.
—& I will be dead, this will have been me—

not to my homeland, although that too, nor a lover,
exactly,
nor others surely, nor water & skyline, those too,

but to that absolute lure, intuition,
a coal sunset after diamonds

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from the incremental gazes of the maiden dancers.
From the gazes of the dancers,

the laughter of my young lover
for those who want to know

all I will know of having a daughter.
At this altitude

grasses sprout like headdresses on the roofs of adobe, & in them
the dream of a blustery day in a City.

Under the wheel
on the High Road to Taos, deconstruction, demystification, demolition,

the unexpected downpour daily at four or five.
No longer harrassed by my passions, hunter yellow & spring yellow,

violet blue, light gray,
there comes to pass like mid-summer through a mountain

cheerfulness, sorrow, serenity.
No one go with me.

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Robert Pack

Clayfeld Renews His Vow

Weeding the garden, Clayfeld sprained his finger
pulling out a stubborn root,
and had to have his wedding ring cut off
because his finger swelled so much.
For safekeeping, he sealed it in an envelope
and filed it with his tax receipts,
planning to have it welded whole again
as soon as his offending
egg-plant purple finger shrank to size.
When Clayfeld looked for it
after an interval of one full year,
the ring had disappeared;
Clayfeld suspected that his wife had stolen it
to dramatize her point:
he carelessly neglected his accounts.
Clayfeld refused, however,
to admit to her that he had lost the ring,
hoping somehow it would turn up
or he'd discover where she'd hidden it.
One clear May morning
Clayfeld went out hiking in the woods
to hunt the most delectable
of mushrooms, True Morels, which one could find,
if lucky, underneath an oak,
their "pine cone" heads protruding from decaying leaves
on pallid stems. But not today.
"We'll have to do without morels this year," grumped
Clayfeld to his mushroom pouch,
spying an unfamiliar yellow butterfly
upon a rotting hemlock stump.

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Clayfeld stalked closer and, incredibly,
    a ring was gleaming there
within a spider's web amid the dew,
    so like his own,
he wondered if his wife had left it
    resting in an open place
his mushroom hunt would likely lead him to.
    Clayfeld attempted to recall
the pattern etched so clearly on his ring:
    the hieroglyphs suggestive
of departing birds above a stream whose flow showed
    only as an undulating line.
Twelve birds—for each month of the year—
    that's more, he thought, than he
remembered being there. And yet how many rings
    could have designs like that?
Clayfeld decided right then on the spot
    to put it on as if
it were his own lost ring, and bluff, barefacedly
    insisting to his wife
he had the ring repaired two months ago.
    At dinner Clayfeld visibly
betrayed surprise when smiling Evelyn
    served him morels sautéed
in pepper butter, delicately sliced,
    but she responded with:
"Don't worry—these morels, my dear, were picked
    from our own friendly woods;
I wouldn't unintentionally poison you!"
    Clayfeld pretended
so convincingly, he almost could believe
    that he had really started
to hallucinate, chanting incantatory
    vatic cadences: "I see
my Soul, a golden butterfly, transfigured
    from the dross of lowly earth,
now rising toward the sun, its final home."
    "O Clayfeld," awestruck

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Evelyn implored, "you can't abandon me
in this dull vale of tears alone,
my debt to immortality unpaid!"
"O.K. But only if you'll
marry me for richer," Clayfeld instantly replied.
"These twelve migrating birds
my mother left me on her wedding ring—
here, take them as my own
eternal token," Clayfeld added, kissing her
he placed it on the finger
of his twice betrothed Evelyn, and relished—
like a hummingbird that sips
sweet nectar from a rose—the taste of "Yes, I do,"
still lingering upon her lips.

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Toby Olson

Shining Hour

The faces of four beautiful women
who sit in chairs, in the living room,
reading parts of newspapers,
tired after dinner.

Their lips are slightly parted;
their lids are low;
they seem not to be breathing
under the fabric
of their rough, casual clothing.

A man plays the piano, and enters it;
one turns to him.
The light is soft in her glasses:
ghost of a chance? shining hour?

Then the eyes of all four are closing,
papers lowered to laps,
food melting in their stomachs,
those moon curves) under the fabric.

What does a man know, exactly, but money?
Their faces are not lonely;
they are not sad.
They don't want money:
a circle of pennies
on my desk, *I see your face before me.*

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One rises in a while and leaves the room,
and when she returns, she is crying.
What men know is economic
or childish: satisfaction.

She goes to the chair of another,
her own kind to hold her.
One is newly bewildered,
but the music has her. The men are fools.

Four beautiful women,
in respite in the music that holds them.
I am in love with all of them, and I have money.

The songs are edged with such irony.
This is our quiet evening.

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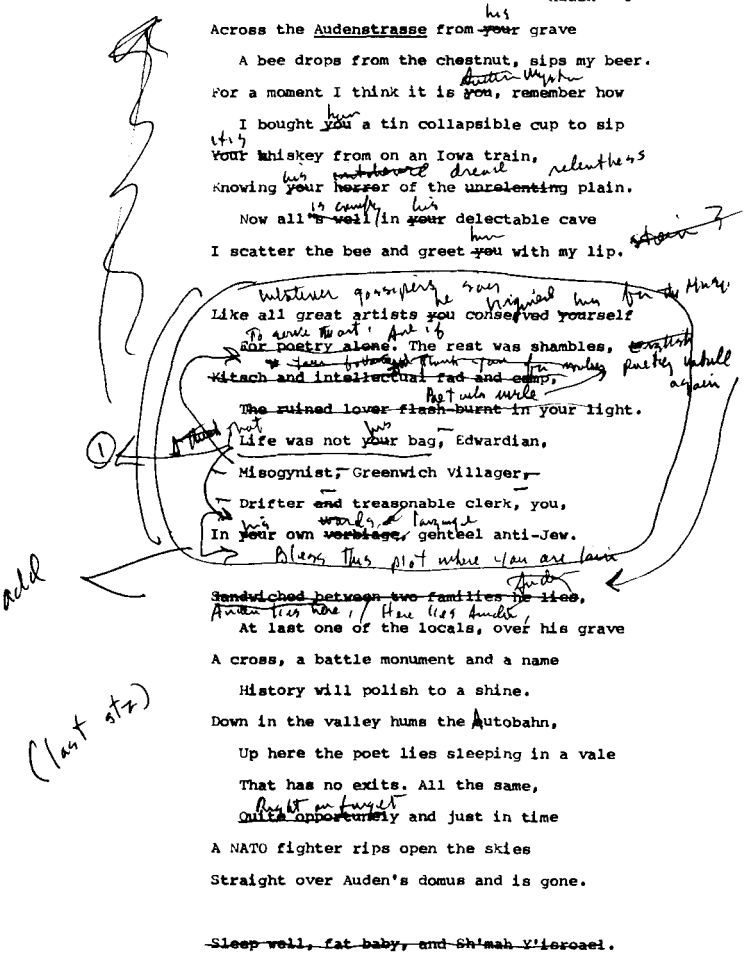

Across the Audenstrasse from ~~your~~ his grave

A bee drops from the chestnut, sips my beer.
For a moment I think it is ~~you~~, remember how

I bought ~~you~~ him a tin collapsible cup to sip
~~your~~ his whiskey from on an Iowa train,
Knowing ~~your~~ his ~~horror~~ of the ~~unrelenting~~ plain.

Now all ~~is well~~ is comfy in ~~your~~ his delectable cave
I scatter the bee and greet ~~you~~ him with my lip.

Like all great artists ~~you~~ he conserved ~~yourself~~
~~for poetry alone.~~ The rest was shambles,
~~Kitsch and intellectual fad and camp,~~
~~The ruined lover flash-burnt~~ in your light.
Life was not ~~your~~ his bag, Edwardian,
Misogynist, Greenwich Villager,
Drifter ~~and~~ treasonable clerk, you,
In ~~your~~ his own ~~verbiage~~, genteel anti-Jew.

~~Sandwiched between two families he lies,~~
At last one of the locals, over his grave

A cross, a battle monument and a name

History will polish to a shine.

Down in the valley hums the Autobahn,

Up here the poet lies sleeping in a vale

That has no exits. All the same,
~~Quite opportunely~~ and just in time

A NATO fighter rips open the skies

Straight over Auden's domus and is gone.

~~Sleep well, fat baby, and Sh'mah Y'isroael.~~

A Karl Shapiro manuscript page from his poem "At Auden's Grave," which appears in this issue.

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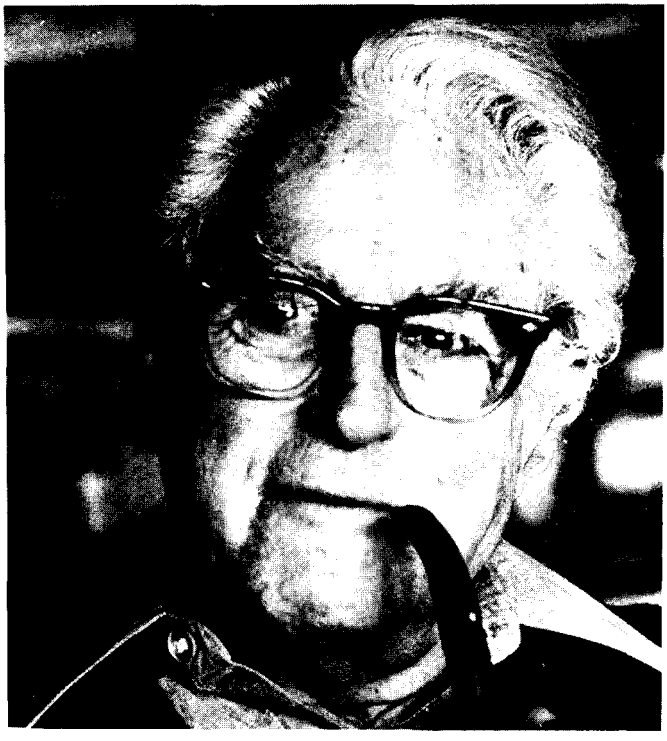

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The Art of Poetry XXXVI
Karl Shapiro

After living for decades in California, Karl Shapiro now lives at least half the year on New York's Upper West Side, twenty blocks north of Zabar's, the landmark food emporium, and ten blocks south of Columbia University. This interview took place in his Morningside Heights apartment, where he lives with his third wife, the translator and editor Sophie Wilkins. The eleventh-floor view from their book-lined apartment overlooks the enormous Cathedral of St. John the Divine. At the time of the interview, late December 1984, Shapiro was busy with two projects—putting together his thirteenth book of

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poems, and finishing his autobiography. During his lifetime he has received numerous honors, including the Pulitzer Prize in 1945 for his second volume of verse, V-Letter and Other Poems; *the Bollingen Prize in Poetry in 1969 for his* Selected Poems, *a three-hundred and thirty-three page collection from thirty years' work; appointment as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress; and membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Perhaps his best-known volumes of outspoken criticism are* To Abolish Children and Other Essays *(1968), and* The Poetry Wreck: Selected Essays 1950–1970 *(1975).*

Now seventy-two, he is an energetic and handsome man with a full head of white hair and expressive dark eyes behind plastic-rimmed glasses. What strikes one are his gentleness, his fine manners, and his soft voice—from his essays, one would expect a bit of a wildman. During the hours of the interview—done in one long session—he chain-smoked and sipped a little wine.

INTERVIEWER

You were in the army, during World War II, when your first two books of poems, *Person, Place and Thing* and *V-Letter and Other Poems* came out in this country. When you returned from the War, were you aware of having become the literary spokesman of your generation?

KARL SHAPIRO

Words like "spokesman" and "touchstone" took me completely by surprise. For very real reasons. Not only had I been out of the country when my first two books were published, but I have always been "out of the country" in the sense that I never had what ordinarily is thought of as a literary life, or been part of a literary group. What psychiatrists nowadays call a support system. I never had any of that and still don't. I've never been magnetized toward a center like New York. I never even thought of living in New York. When I first started to publish single poems, the place I thought of was Chicago, since *Poetry* magazine was there. And you didn't have to live in Chicago to have something printed by them. I thought *Poetry* was preferable

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to any magazine that I knew of in New York except perhaps *Partisan Review*, and that was relatively new and wasn't specifically poetry anyway. So when I was in the army in New Guinea and finally got the reviews that people sent of my first book, they were all very heady to me. Using words like "spokesman." I was baffled. I wasn't sure what the reviewers were talking about, because I had no associations with anybody. I had never met a poet in my life before winning the Pulitzer in 1945. Well, that's not strictly true; when I went to Johns Hopkins in 1939, W.H. Auden gave a private reading to a group of special literature students, and I was one. I shook hands with him. As it happened, at that time he was my idol, above all others as a modern poet, and that experience was a very sustaining one. But I could hardly say I "knew" him.

INTERVIEWER

How old was Auden then?

SHAPIRO

Well, in 1939—he was born in 1907—he was quite young. He looked it. And he did something that impressed me no end. He read at this club called the Tudor and Stuart, at Johns Hopkins, and he didn't have his book with him. He recited almost the entire book beautifully, and it included the elegy on Freud and the one on Yeats. That was a magnificent experience! But from my point of view, it was something like a rustic going to the opera. At that time I hadn't published a thing except a privately-printed book.

INTERVIEWER

Is it true that your wife put your first and second books together during the war in your absence?

SHAPIRO

The first really was an adaptation of a long group of poems that James Laughlin at New Directions had printed in an anthology called *Five Young American Poets*. Those were published just at the time I was about to be sent overseas, and I

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begged Laughlin to publish a separate book of mine instead of putting them in that anthology. Well, I was unknown and he wouldn't do it. He never did a book of mine. But that anthology was the occasion of my first reviews, and they were good ones. After I went overseas, my wife, Evalyn, in fact moved from Baltimore to New York for the purpose of getting more of my work published. She was working as a secretary in some office in Baltimore and had no real ties. She did have friends in Manhattan. I'd send Evalyn individual poems as they were finished. I had no way of sending them to magazines. We were on the move all the time and mail was heavily censored and all mail at that time was sent by ship, which took three to four months. It wasn't until later in the war they began to photograph letters, those letters called "V-letters" which gave the title to my second collection. Then the mail became faster. Anyway, Evalyn did meet publishers, especially Reynal and Hitchcock, who were then a new firm. Albert Erskine, my lifelong editor, was the editor there and he accepted the book that I called *Person, Place and Thing.* And when that firm died, I followed Erskine to Random House.

INTERVIEWER

What were the physical circumstances of your writing during the war? Did you have much time off?

SHAPIRO

I was drafted a year before the war, when it was a one-year peacetime draft that people have forgotten about now. And I was in almost a year when Pearl Harbor happened, so I couldn't get out. But because I was from Baltimore, I was sent to the Medical Corps—all of us who were drafted from Baltimore that first day were sent to the Medical Corps. I guess they knew the war was coming and were trying to build it up. A lot of us were orderlies from hospitals but many were clerks, stenographers and so on. I was studying in a library school at the time, I was going to be a librarian. But I couldn't take the final exam because I was drafted. Nobody had ever heard of a student deferment in those days. Because of my background of two years

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of college at Johns Hopkins, they put me in the company headquarters office and gave me a typewriter.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have access to a typewriter throughout the war?

SHAPIRO

I did. Because I became the company clerk and even in very bad situations, like combat, my job was to be on the typewriter. Although I carried a .45 and a carbine like everyone else.

INTERVIEWER

But what about the availability of a library? You also wrote *Essay on Rime* when you were stationed in the South Pacific area. It's full of quotes from Eliot, Auden, Yeats, Cummings, Crane . . .

SHAPIRO

There weren't that many quotes. Besides, I had a book. I'd met William Van O'Connor [later a literary critic] in New Guinea and we became friends right away. He was stationed at Fort Morely and so was I. We were waiting to go someplace else and Bill gave me his copy of the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, which Yeats had edited. I had that book and I had quotes in my head and there was always a Bible. And that was about it. I later heard there was an army library nearby, but if there was I had never heard of it. Anyway, I wrote *Essay on Rime* to amuse myself. We had been told that we were going to be in one spot for ninety days with nothing to do. So we were just sitting there waiting to be shipped to the Dutch East Indies. Well, I had the office and the typewriter and the paper, so I blocked out a poem. I figured I wanted to write a poem about poetry, an essay like Pope's. And I actually diagrammed it—I had never done that before in my life. But I diagrammed how many sections there would be, how many lines per section, how much on prosody and how much on language, and so on. I figured precisely how many lines I would write a day to get the book done in ninety days, and I did it. It was thirty lines a day, and

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I went to the office every day and wrote those thirty lines. I had no reports to write. The office was deserted.

INTERVIEWER

It's a prodigious feat.

SHAPIRO

Well, yes, but you see, I had it all in my head—I had read everything on prosody before I was drafted. Don't forget I'd been working in a big library and I knew a lot about prosody. Nobody ever read prosody books except me. And the rest of the stuff in the poem was simply my ideas about Auden and Williams and the rest.

INTERVIEWER

Then you mailed the book off to your wife?

SHAPIRO

Not all at once. I sent her sections, and a piece appeared in the *Kenyon Review* and another in the *Southern Review.*

INTERVIEWER

This was in the days before duplicating machines. Did anything ever get lost in the mail?

SHAPIRO

I don't recall that it did. I kept carbons. But it took a year for the bound copy of my first book to reach me. It nearly drove me crazy, waiting.

INTERVIEWER

When did you realize you were going to become a writer?

SHAPIRO

Probably when I was in high school, because I already had a reputation of being a poet. The English teachers always liked what I did and put my stuff up on the bulletin boards. I never had any idea of publication, though. In high school, in Balti-

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more, I wrote a sonnet about Mahatma Gandhi. From which I can only remember one line, "Dim adumbration of a dim intent." Not bad for high school, but it was supposed to be a favorable poem about Gandhi! I would play hookey from school in Baltimore, which is an historic place, and go to places like Federal Hill, where you can see where the American flag was that inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star Spangled Banner." I would go there and write love poems. I was seventeen or eighteen—a little late for high school, because I had to transfer to three different schools because of my family moving about.

INTERVIEWER

Somewhere I read you said you only had a "half-education."

SHAPIRO

Well, "half" is an exaggeration. I went to the University of Virginia and quit after the first semester. Then five years later I went to Johns Hopkins and studied English literature, Greek, Latin, French and history. I was there only two years. I was in some kind of accelerated thing. I was supposed to go for two years, then enter the graduate school. But I had to drop out. So what I don't have is a formal education in the sense that I could pass the Graduate Record Exam, or whatever they call it. My education is at best spotty.

INTERVIEWER

What did your father do?

SHAPIRO

He was a salesman. So many fathers of American writers were—Arthur Miller's, Tennessee Williams'. My father was ingenious. He made special products out of the waste products of oil. I think he was the first one whose idea it was to put motor oil into cans and sell them in grocery stores. He did things like that and got people to produce his ideas for him. Before Baltimore we lived in Virginia, in Norfolk, where he had his own business. But during the Depression I never was able to find

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a job. My father would beg me to, but it was impossible. So until he finally invented jobs for my brother and me, I was allowed to stay home and write.

INTERVIEWER

Most war poems aren't remembered. But several of yours are among your best. Is war still a factor in your dreams or outlook? Did the war permanently change you?

SHAPIRO

Oh yes, I think it did. It probably does to anybody who was ever in a war. The first book review I ever wrote was for *Poetry* magazine, in the thirties. They asked me to write a review of the poets of the First World War who had just published new collections. There was Siegfried Sassoon, and Edmund Blunden, and others. And I went and dug their old books out of the library and noticed they hadn't been read since the First World War. It struck me as very sad that these men who were now probably in their fifties or so, and had never gotten over their experiences, were forgotten. Passed over. They were all in the trenches too. I remarked in my review that war seems to be a permanent tattoo, or scar, on those who have been in it.

INTERVIEWER

Some of your later poems—"The Phenomenon" and "In the Waxworks"—seem concerned with nightmares, whereas your earlier work is very rational, almost idealistic. Are you aware of undergoing any personality changes that could account for that?

SHAPIRO

I'm not aware of any changes in personality or outlook. "The Phenomenon" might be called a war poem, too. I was very surprised when *The New Yorker* accepted it. The other one was about the honky tonk in Baltimore, where the low bars and cheap hotels and burlesque houses are. I was writing about the unconscious part of a civilized city. Of all the stuff that drifts to the bottom.

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INTERVIEWER

In your early poems, it strikes me you were somewhat of a verbal voluptuary. A poem like "Buick," for instance, which I love to read aloud just for the sounds of it. Were Hopkins or Hart Crane influences?

SHAPIRO

Oh, definitely, both of them. And even to this day, I have never lost my admiration for and involvement with them. I very much resented the critical treatment of Crane by people like Yvor Winters. "Buick" was a love poem, so I was trying to make it as sensuous as possible. I always felt that poem was perhaps the first Pop poem: you know, taking a beer can and making it six feet high. I was taking the image of this car, the Buick itself, which is still a voluptuous automobile, I tell you—I was in one recently.

INTERVIEWER

The Buick in your poem—was that a car you owned?

SHAPIRO

I never owned one. If you want to know how I got the idea of writing that poem, I was hitchhiking back to the army base one night between Petersburg, Virginia, and Baltimore, and an officer from my camp stopped for me. He drove what appeared to be a new Buick. Now there is a straight road that goes from Richmond to Fredericksburg and at that time of night there were no cars on it. He got this thing up to 100 mph. And that was like flying—all those beautiful lights on the dashboard moving around!

INTERVIEWER

Do you still hold Auden's work in as high esteem as you did?

SHAPIRO

Yes I do. And unlike most critics I've read, I think that Auden's later work is his best—those poems written in a kind of adap-

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tation of the Horatian Odes which he did so well and which served him so well—all the poems he wrote while he lived in Austria at the end of his life. I think they are certainly among his finest. They are not the big portentous poems, like "For the Time Being," though things like "For the Time Being" are magnificent.

INTERVIEWER

In the middle or late fifties, Whitman became very important to you—almost in religious terms. Can you comment on that? And what about Poe?

SHAPIRO

As a matter of fact, I was born under the same roof where Poe died, the same Baltimore hospital where there is a plaque on the wall. Whenever people came from out of town, I would always take them to Poe's grave, which was in a slum of the city even when I lived there. It is a very ugly tombstone. The decorations on it were sent from France.

INTERVIEWER

Why did the French love Poe?

SHAPIRO

Because Baudelaire discovered him and, well, his symbolism. Poe was the father of symbolism. Now, I am on the other side of the railroad tracks from symbolism, so Poe never appealed to me. Every kid read his stories and his poems. We used to memorize "The Bells." I could never take Poe seriously. On the other hand, there was Whitman. Whitman to me is the most fascinating of American poets. Whitman started to write the great poetry from scratch after he had written all that junk for newspapers, the sentimental lyrical poems. All of a sudden he wrote *Leaves of Grass.* When I was teaching at the University of Nebraska, my friend James Miller was chairman of the English Department. He wrote the first book attempting to make a parallel between the structure of *Leaves of Grass* and the steps of the mystical experience as in St. John of the Cross. I was com-

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pletely bowled over by this, not having been able to explain how Whitman came to write "Song of Myself," which is unlike anything not only in American literature, but unique in all the world. The parallels to it are mystical literature. Miller tried to show that there was actual evidence for this kind of experience which evidently happens at a particular moment in someone's life.

INTERVIEWER

Whitman wasn't fashionable at the time you took him up.

SHAPIRO

When I saw the negative reaction to Whitman with the great ruling critics of the time, I couldn't believe it. Eliot never really gave up hammering away on Whitman, neither did Pound. Although Pound makes little concessions. Whitman, you know, didn't have any influence in this country until Allen Ginsberg came along. I am not crazy about the Whitman element in Ginsberg; it seems to me Ginsberg knew what Whitman was doing, but Ginsberg is a programmer and a propagandist and a politician. His poetry has suffered very badly. There's some great stuff—poetry of lamentation and so on—but so much of it is theatrical and phony.

INTERVIEWER

We can see the Cathedral of St. John the Divine from here. I saw you at the dedication of the new Poets' Corner there. Who would you honor next, if it were up to you?

SHAPIRO

Let's see. . . . who were the first three? Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, and Washington Irving, for some reason. Poe would have to be in there, and Melville and Emerson. And they should certainly install T.S. Eliot first among the moderns.

INTERVIEWER

What about Wallace Stevens?

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SHAPIRO

Oh yes. I'd put him neck and neck with Eliot.

INTERVIEWER

Robert Lowell?

SHAPIRO

Well, yes, if it comes to that.

INTERVIEWER

We forgot Pound.

SHAPIRO

If I have an objective opinion about Pound, it is that he remained more of a novice. He never really achieved what he set out to do. There is a very strange thing that happened to the modern poets, the famous ones. They all had one goal in common—to discover a form, or *the* form. Something like alchemists looking for the secret. Auden found his form—the ode. And William Carlos Williams wrote his best work in that kind of tercet form that he stumbled on after many years. But Eliot and Pound never succeeded in discovering the form in which they could write naturally. The *Cantos* remains a scaffolding for a structure that was never built.

INTERVIEWER

Can you think of a good poet who has a bad ear?

SHAPIRO

Yes, but I can't say this on tape. The author of *All the King's Men.*

INTERVIEWER

You didn't name him.

SHAPIRO

Of course not! It astonishes me that this can be. That there's a poet who has a tin ear. Some people say this is also true of

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Thomas Hardy. Hardy was a wonderful poet, but I don't think he was as tone deaf to the musicality of words as the other gentleman I alluded to. It happens infrequently, but it does happen. I imagine the Victorians said it about Browning. But it's certainly not true of the famous modern poets like Williams and Eliot and so on.

INTERVIEWER

You once wrote that an astonishing fact about the twentieth century is that it is without its poet. Do you feel that is still true today?

SHAPIRO

Oh no, I've changed my position on that. As some others already have said, in terms of English and American poets, it would be quite just to call this The Age of Auden. Not only because Auden was such a dominant and successful poet, but because he went through all the contradictory ideological phases, from Marx to God. He really is representative in that sense. When Auden and his colleagues were writing their social revolutionary stuff in the late thirties, they were really representative of what the good poets were doing at the time—with the exceptions of Eliot and Pound. And Auden finally capitulated to the Church of England and Christianity and all that. I think he was the poor shadow of the kind of ideology which in one way or another pervades the poetic atmosphere today. We have a lot of politically-biased poetry, even when it is political Feminist. So the Age of Auden is as good as any name for where we are now. It could hardly be called the Age of Eliot or Pound or Williams or Ginsberg. Because they didn't have that umbrella.

INTERVIEWER

In 1964, when you published *The Bourgeois Poet*, you made a clean break—not only with the poems of your past, but it seemed with all European art before the Renaissance. When did you recognize the futility of the well-made formal poem? And did you have a model—Ginsberg?

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SHAPIRO

Certainly not Ginsberg! Influence is strange. Because one can be influenced powerfully in every way but technique. For instance, I would think Walt Whitman probably had more influence on my whole poetic thinking than anybody, but I never dreamed of trying to write in the Whitman manner. My precedent for the style of *The Bourgeois Poet* is French poetry. When I shipped out overseas, from Boston to Australia, it took forty days. I carried a baggage sack full of books, which is an awful thing to do because I had to carry them. There were no porters for a private or corporal. Among the books I took was Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* in a bilingual edition. I also had a French dictionary and did some translations of my own on the ship. I think it was then and there I fastened on the manner of *The Bourgeois Poet* poems. When I got to Australia, I published a privately-printed book in which my first poems appeared. They're in that style. In fact, I still keep two of those poems in my latest collected poems: "The Dirty Word" and "The New Ring." I liked writing in that style very much, but at the time it seemed a dead end. It wasn't until the early sixties that I returned to the model and did more.

INTERVIEWER

Was *The Bourgeois Poet* conceived and written as a book, or as individual poems that somehow came together?

SHAPIRO

No, no, as a book. I had a Guggenheim, to go to Europe, and I wanted to write a kind of autobiography in verse. But I didn't know exactly how to do it. I took all the letters I had written to Evalyn. I carried them in a metal case. She still has those letters, incidentally—she's trying to sell them. With my permission, of course. Anyhow, I was trying to write about becoming a poet, using some of those letters as a basis. I found I could not write in Italy. I've since discovered that I can't write when I'm traveling. Later trips to Rome, London, all ended the same way. I love Europe, but whenever I go there, I feel I'm

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catching a disease. So I cut that trip short and came home. I lived in Nebraska then and I had a study built in my garage. When it was done, I sat down and wrote *The Bourgeois Poet* poems straight off. I wrote one every day. There were ninety-four in the book, some quite long.

INTERVIEWER

Did you complete more than the ninety-four?

SHAPIRO

God yes. I had quite a lot I wanted to say then—either about the past or the present or from the point of view of a middle-class American poet, Jewish, and living in the middle of the United States and having come through certain things.

INTERVIEWER

Will you publish some of the unpublished ones?

SHAPIRO

Probably not. I had given all that stuff to the Library of Congress a few years ago, and when I put together my recent volume of new and selected poems, I sent to the Library and asked to see what was there. They sent me a stack a foot high. But I found almost nothing I would subsequently use. Albert Erskine thought I'd sent him too much to begin with. I don't think he ever really liked the book, although he published it. There was no real editing involved. He just told me to put it into some kind of sequence. It was too random at the beginning, he said. "This *is* Random House, isn't it?" I replied. He was not amused. So I found an order, and it was a book. My best selling one, I believe.

INTERVIEWER

You wrote in that book that you are of the race to whom "the audience brings me news of my death." Have you been conscious of trying to overcome a critical decline, or to live up to your early reputation?

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SHAPIRO

Well, no. When I wrote that I was, you know, very well received. I think I took that expression from Freud. Certain people were wrecked by success, like Dylan Thomas and Delmore Schwartz. I've continued. In fact, I'm not so sure when I used that phrase, in that context, that I meant the race of Jews and not the race of poets.

INTERVIEWER

Oh. I took it to mean poets.

SHAPIRO

Good. Because I always had this feeling—I've heard other Jews say—that when you can't find any other explanation for Jews, you say, "Well, they are poets." There are a great many similarities. This is a theme running all through my stuff from the very beginning. The poet is in exile whether he is or he is not. Because of what everybody knows about society's idea of the artist as a peripheral character and a potential bum. Or troublemaker. Well, the Jews began their career of troublemaking by inventing the God whom Wallace Stevens considers the ultimate poetic idea. And so I always thought of myself as being both in and out of society at the same time. Like the way most artists probably feel in order to survive—you have to at least pretend that you are "seriously" in the world. Or actually perform in it while you know that in your own soul you are not in it at all. You are outside observing it. You must know exactly what I mean.

INTERVIEWER

I do. What does it mean to you to be a Jew? Christ is certainly one of your myths. What has being Jewish done to your work?

SHAPIRO

Just everything, in a way. I went through a period like many middle-class Jews in which I consciously drew away from the religion and everything Jewish in my life. And I think for a

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long time, say in the 1930s, I felt completely cured of the religious virus. And of course at that time, everybody was enveloped in radical politics and nobody really took religion seriously. Even among poets—except Eliot. During the war I became more interested in Christianity. I had a friend who used to write me enormously long letters. She was a very religious Catholic who wanted to become a nun. And she tried to convert me. She sent me a missal and a rosary, the works. I think I was hypnotized—she almost succeeded. I actually went to the Catholic chaplain at the time and asked for instruction. But he was too busy or didn't want to be bothered. That was the end of that. I think this is a phase many Jews go through. When I came back from the war, I returned to my original position of neutrality. I didn't think about religion and I didn't care. I felt I didn't have any personal stake in that kind of thinking. I had by then become known as a poet and was given very good jobs—teaching in universities, Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress. I considered myself above religion.

INTERVIEWER

This doesn't sound like the author of *Poems of a Jew* speaking.

SHAPIRO

The actual turning point in my life was the voting of the Bollingen Prize to Ezra Pound. This sounds real crackpot, but it is true! I was one of the people on that jury, and I was the only one who voted against giving the prize to Pound. There was an enormous amount of publicity about it. It was a great blow to me, the publicity and scandal. I was suddenly forced into a conscious decision to stand up and be counted as a Jew. Jewish organizations got in touch with me, Jewish papers wanted me to write things for them, make me a spokesman.

INTERVIEWER

Were you against his getting the prize because you didn't think the *Pisan Cantos* good poetry, or because you abhorred Pound's politics?

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SHAPIRO

Both. But I would have voted for the *Pisan Cantos* if it hadn't been for all the anti-Semitic and anti-American propaganda in them. Well, when the Bollingen Prize was kicked out of the Library of Congress and went to Yale, I was kept on the committee for two years, then dropped. From that point on, I began to write essays, like my book *In Defense of Ignorance*, in which I pointed to the politics in poetry. For instance, there is no question that Allen Tate and Eliot were attempting to set up an equivalent of the French Academy in the Library of Congress. They seemed to have the backing. People like Robert Lowell, who was young but definitely on the make as a critical culturalist and wanted to be in charge. From that point on, I became a kind of guerrilla fighter and sniper.

INTERVIEWER

That does seem to be your reputation!

SHAPIRO

I was at Notre Dame just a few years ago, and one of the professors there said to me, "You don't know what effect *In Defense of Ignorance* had. It ripped the whole academic community in half!" I'm glad I wrote the book. I like it, and I still stand by my observations, although I wouldn't write it so violently now. I guess I really *am* in the Whitman tradition. The Eliot lecture I gave in Cincinnati also caused an uproar. Some of the professors got up and walked out in the middle of it. Then when the piece was published in *Saturday Review*, it caused another stir. All I did was call Eliot a theologian gone astray, a failed poet who hates originality. I said his importance exists only in the minds of a few critics. That's all. Oh, yes—I also called *Four Quartets* a deliberately bad book.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel upset when people walk out of your lectures?

SHAPIRO

I don't think about it. For two reasons. First, I have a sort

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of special status around English departments. I'm not really a professor, but a sort of mad guest. Second, I really wasn't alone in my feelings about Eliot and Modernism. When I was at the University of Nebraska, there was a core of people who felt the way I did—James Miller, Bernice Slote, others.

INTERVIEWER

Do you deliver your lectures off the cuff?

SHAPIRO

Hardly. I write them out very carefully, the product of much rumination. Except for my Henry Miller piece. I did that one just a couple of days before I had to deliver it. I was sitting in a beautiful house overlooking a golf course and drinking Scotch. I wrote it while I was bombed, but it came out just the way I wanted. The woman who lived in that house left and put a whole bottle of Scotch in front of me. Which I drank. I had to get drunk to write that essay, because Evalyn couldn't stand the name of Henry Miller. She didn't want any of his books around the house. And she was with me at the time, so I couldn't write the essay in the hotel where we were staying. So I wrote it on the side, in a borrowed house. It's a kind of secret lecture.

INTERVIEWER

You regarded Miller as a holy man. You called him "Gandhi with a penis." Do you still think of him in that way?

SHAPIRO

As a matter of fact, I don't. But you have to remember that when I wrote about Henry Miller, he was completely banned. I had always been a crusader against censorship. That was part of the reason for my strong stand. The books of Miller's I owned were all smuggled into the States by friends who would visit Switzerland and get them past customs. I had illegal books, and this is great fun. But it was very important to me because Miller never claimed that he was a writer. Henry James was a writer; Miller was a gabber, a prophet. And as far as pornog-

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raphy goes, he didn't aim to write erotica. He aimed to write the whole truth about the life he knew, which included sex. As a matter of fact, it is Miller who was the twentieth-century reincarnation of Whitman, not Ginsberg.

INTERVIEWER

Let's return to *The Bourgeois Poet* one last time. That was your first and last thematic book of poems?

SHAPIRO

That was the only one of its kind, and I knew when I had come to the end of it too. Actually, there is a plot in that book. It has to do with a female graduate student I was involved with.

INTERVIEWER

It sounds as if the subject matter spilled over into your novel, *Edsel.*

SHAPIRO

Subject matter, yes. But the technique of *The Bourgeois Poet* I'd invented for myself, out of Baudelaire. And I invented the typographical form, which I got partly from a poet named Byron Vazakas. Do you remember him? Williams liked his stuff. He wrote prose poems in the shape of the state of Oklahoma. And when I did the book, I didn't want my paragraphs to look exactly like prose, so I reversed the indentation process and had the body of the poems indented and the initial line extended to the left-hand margin. Like a pan handle.

INTERVIEWER

So you call that book prose?

SHAPIRO

No, no. A lot of it is the sort of old-fashioned free verse of the King James Bible. It was an unconscious imitation of the Old Testament declamatory poetry. But that is a step backwards from the straight prose style in terms of versification. What I was sure of at the time was that the two traditional attributes

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of poetry—rhyme and versification—were not only nonessential, but artificial impediments to the poetic process.

INTERVIEWER

But in your next book after that, *White-Haired Lover*, you returned to traditional verse forms.

SHAPIRO

I did and I didn't. Most of them are in conventional forms like a sonnet, but they're not what anyone would call good sonnet form. The meters are too bumpy. And there's no intent to conform to, say, the iambic pattern. There's no inversion in the second foot and that kind of thing. I didn't pay attention to that. In fact, I was doing what Eliot succeeded in doing when he discovered his own kind of iambic and free verse, which he called Websterian. Whether or not Webster was just a bad versifier, or trying to make the line conform to whatever speech was in his time, I don't know. But Eliot succeeded in adapting Webster to get a line which both is and is not iambic. And so, in other words, is loose.

INTERVIEWER

Did the critics know what you were up to?

SHAPIRO

Not really. Those who liked *The Bourgeois Poet* style criticized the sonnet business, and said, "Who the hell writes sonnets in 1968?" That sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER

A religious magazine once called you "the Mort Sahl of literary criticism." Do you take your critics seriously?

SHAPIRO

I try to avoid reading them. I forget who made that crack about Mort Sahl. It must have been during the time I was writing inflammatory stuff. There are a lot of critics who are very offended and irritated by my kind of criticism, and they attack

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me. I naturally expect that. Cleanth Brooks published a book in which he said he didn't know how to categorize me. I thought that was very flattering.

INTERVIEWER

Do you want to talk about Dylan MaGoon?

SHAPIRO

Oh sure. That was perhaps naive of me, but I was very upset when I saw that Random House—my publisher—was publishing Rod McKuen too. I had been invited to talk at the American Library Association, and I used that as an example of the degeneration of publishing poetry. I didn't want to throw in his real name, so I made him a mixture of Bob Dylan and Rod McKuen. In fact, McKuen's agent heard about it and got angry. He didn't do anything, though.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever been involved in a lawsuit?

SHAPIRO

Only over my suicide. Put "suicide" in quotes.

INTERVIEWER

One would hope.

SHAPIRO

Yes, I'd like to get this in. I beat the American Medical Association in a lawsuit because of a libelous accusation. When I signed the settlement with their lawyers, there was a clause that said I would never publish anything about this. So let's publish it by all means! Here's what happened. Someone sent me a copy of the *Journal of the American Medical Association.* In it a professor of psychiatry had published an article about Sylvia Plath and the plight of American authors and poets who commit suicide. At the beginning she gave a list, including Hart Crane, Hemingway, John Berryman, Randall Jarrell (which is risky—he may not have jumped), and so on. And I was on

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the list of suicides. I wrote this woman a letter demanding an explanation. She replied saying she hoped I still had my sense of humor. I did. She was a graduate student who got a Ph.D in English and then an M.D.—very ambitious. So I forgot all about it, because I didn't know anybody who read the *Journal of the American Medical Association.* I just asked her to retract my name or take it out in case the thing was ever reprinted. A year later, she sold the article—intact—to *Saturday Evening Post.* She'd never taken my name out. Now, I never see that magazine, either, but one of my students came to me waving it and said, "Have you seen this?" I was so upset and furious, I got a lawyer. It dragged on for two years. I had my local country lawyer and the American Medical Association had a battery of Chicago lawyers. I sued the University of Iowa Medical School and the woman who wrote the article; I sued the *Saturday Evening Post* and the Curtis Publishing Company. My lawyer was even thinking of sending me to actors school to learn how to act on the witness stand. I thought, my God, I can't take this. I lost twenty pounds in about two weeks. I had night sweats and all the symptoms of TB without spitting blood. It was the first serious illness I ever had in my life, all apparently psychosomatic. We finally made a settlement and it was enough for Teri, my second wife, to buy two houses and get into the real estate business. And the woman who wrote the article was promoted.

INTERVIEWER

Of course. You've edited two magazines as well as teaching. Was editing better for your writing than teaching?

SHAPIRO

My editing was fortuitous. I had no training in it—does anybody? I worked purely by instinct. Writers told me I was a good editor, and I know I had some successes in people and pieces I discovered. But when I was happy teaching, it was because I was teaching things like modern poetry, not teaching writing at all. But as it happened, more of the non-writing academics moved in on the teaching of modern poetry and squeezed us out. They figured this was their business and I should shut up

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about teaching literature and let them do it. So for years and years, I taught nothing but this creative writing class—which disturbed me a lot. Because there was so little I could do and there was no necessity for it except conviviality. It was a very pleasant way to spend the day. I used to have the students come to my house and we'd have wine. They'd read their poems and I'd attempt to comment. Recently I went down to Philadelphia to give a writers' workshop, and it was all adults. I felt I failed them completely. I read their poems carefully, I said what I had to say about them, but I didn't have that much to say. And the conversations degenerated into, "Do you think this word will be better than that word?" I felt I hadn't earned my money.

INTERVIEWER

What about when you edited *Poetry* in Chicago?

SHAPIRO

It wasn't good for my writing. For five years there was a constant involvement with poets from all over the world, not only corresponding with me, but coming to the office, too. But, you know, when I did write, I accomplished some of my best poems while working at *Poetry*—"Adam and Eve" and "The Bathers" and "The Alphabet." Actually, I never had a conscious idea of how fast one must work or how much work one must turn out. I never understood that. And I have never written poetry with the view of having a book. I guess that is true of most poets who write our kind of poetry. You write the individual poem. This is unlike Yeats, who was a thematic poet. And he knew he was. Each book was going to represent some great mythological whatever.

INTERVIEWER

Wasn't there some unpleasantness during the latter days when you edited *Prairie Schooner*?

SHAPIRO

A bit. It involved local morality. I was an editor in the middle

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of Nebraska. I accepted a short story by a man who was quite good, named Irving Krauss. It was a very good clean story about a man who had been a graduate student who comes through a town similar to Lincoln, Nebraska, and stops off to see a woman he used to make love to. She is a beauty parlor operator. (That's where I got the idea for the beauty parlor operator in *Edsel.*) During the course of the story, the ex-graduate student recollects that, when he used to sit in the coffee room of the English department, the homosexual professors would gather to talk and gossip. I was going away, and had accepted the story and it was in galley proof. When I returned, there was a note from the administration (who weren't supposed to have anything to do with this publication). They said the story had to be removed. I went to see them and said, "Hey—what's this?" They said, "The homosexual business." There were quite a few people in the closet at the time, and they didn't want to risk an investigation. They threatened to withdraw funds for the publication. I told the vice chancellor I had accepted the story and I was committed to print it. Since they thought it was so perilous or something, I was going to read it on the radio. (There was an FM station in Lincoln that played good music and even read some poems.) The station manager was delighted. And again I was threatened that I'd be arrested if I read it on the air. When I arrived, the sheriff's car was there, and everybody in Lincoln listened to their radios. I went ahead and read this story, which was really rather sweet. And nothing happened. But after that the handwriting was on the wall for me at the University of Nebraska. I looked for another job.

INTERVIEWER

You seem to thrive on controversy. Your essay on the desirability of abolishing children, for instance. Do you ever get hate mail?

SHAPIRO

Not really hate mail. During the 1960s some students and young instructors at The University of California referred to me as a Fascist. And when I published some poems making fun

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of the protest movement in *Esquire*, one of the San Francisco poets wrote me saying, "I see you're now publishing in men's fashion magazines." Pretty tame stuff.

INTERVIEWER

How was your experience as Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress?

SHAPIRO

Very stormy, as a matter of fact. There was no job as such, because there were no duties as such. It was really at the beginning of the appointments. I think I'm the one who turned it from an honorific into a job. I created work.

INTERVIEWER

You refused membership when you were first elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Why?

SHAPIRO

No particular reason, except I didn't see what it was for. I disliked the idea of cultural academies. In a democracy, it can easily turn into something else. I gave the example of Thomas Jefferson stopping George Washington when George founded the Society of Cincinnatus, which was going to be an hereditary officer corps, and Jefferson said, "You can't do that, George." You can't, by God!

INTERVIEWER

Who are your best friends? Other writers?

SHAPIRO

Not necessarily. Most of my friends have been made outside the occupation. I enjoy writers I think more than anybody else, any other kind of people. But I never go out of my way to be in a writers' situation. I've never accepted an invitation to go to a writers' colony, for instance. I don't see the point. I'm always writing what I want where I happen to be.

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INTERVIEWER

Then you can write anywhere?

SHAPIRO

Yes, except in a foreign country, as I said.

INTERVIEWER

What are your normal working hours?

SHAPIRO

I don't have normal working hours. Although since I've been writing my autobiography, I've been working about three or four hours a day. Usually in the late morning or early afternoons.

INTERVIEWER

At the typewriter?

SHAPIRO

I write prose on the typewriter. I don't like to work in the evening or after, partly because when I use the typewriter, I think I'm keeping people awake upstairs.

INTERVIEWER

This apartment must be a good working environment for you.

SHAPIRO

Oh, it's just perfect. It's got everything.

INTERVIEWER

I haven't heard other people in the building.

SHAPIRO

There are children upstairs and sometimes they trample around on Sunday morning. But that's rare. Do you know what woke me up this morning? Somebody got a saxophone for Christmas. A saxophone is such a city sound. It's quite wonderful.

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INTERVIEWER

Was writing your novel a different process from writing poems?

SHAPIRO

Completely. It had nothing to do with poetry and I—never having written fiction, just one short story—didn't have any inhibitions. I wrote *Edsel* so fast, I wrote parts of it sitting on a beach with a portable typewriter in Tampa, Florida. There were some friends who were on that trip with us, and they would wait for me to finish a chapter. Then they would run across the sand and get it to read.

INTERVIEWER

It's a very inventive novel, very unpredictable. The reader can't guess where he's going next.

SHAPIRO

That's because I didn't know. It was written that fast. I once read that E. M. Forster said, when interviewed about *A Passage to India*, that he knew when those people got into the cave, something terrible was going to happen. He just didn't know what. I felt the same way about *Edsel.* The fascination, you know. It was a marvelous experience for me—I had something I wanted to say, and I think I said it.

INTERVIEWER

In the novel, Edsel says that there is nothing more ridiculous or moving than a poet on the podium. Do you feel that way about poetry readings?

SHAPIRO

In the beginning I was terrified. Then I got to like them. It's hard now to remember when there were practically no poetry readings. People used to invite Archibald MacLeish, but only because he was sort of Undersecretary of State. When I grew up, poetry readings consisted of maybe ten people in a living room. Later, when Eliot read at Wisconsin, he filled the football stadium! Imagine.

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INTERVIEWER

Edsel also says, "I don't see how anybody gets past adolescence without committing suicide at least twice." Was your own adolescence so bad?

SHAPIRO

Worse. Terrible. It might have been because I was brought up in a rather strict Jewish family, and didn't have enough intercourse—if that's the word—with girls. Social intercourse, I mean.

INTERVIEWER

Of course, of course. Is Edsel the definitive shlemiehl?

SHAPIRO

I thought of him more as the shlimazel. You do know the difference? The shlemiehl spills the soup in the shlimazel's lap. In other words, a shlimazel is someone with chronic dependable bad luck. That's not the same as the shlemiehl who is maladroit, whose trouble is his own lack of coordination, social grace, whatever. Edsel's problem is his foreignness, his being a foreign body in academia—he doesn't fit in, and he doesn't fit out, either. So that his shlemiehlism is partly a comic tragedy of his situation.

INTERVIEWER

In the novel you say the hardest thing for a poet is to separate his actual feelings from his poetic feelings. Is there that distinction?

SHAPIRO

There is. I might have had in mind Eliot's statement about aesthetic distance and personal emotion. It's a question of judgement and taste. Suppose I liked Kate Smith and Bing Crosby. At the same time, I'd feel disgusted with myself for liking them. You see?

INTERVIEWER

But you would admit liking them publicly?

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SHAPIRO

Oh, sure. Old Kate Smith records bowl me over.

INTERVIEWER

Edsel described his poems as all jagged glass and rusty nails. Is that how you viewed your own poems at the time?

SHAPIRO

Some. That's how I viewed American poetry generally. You know Louis Simpson's poem on the subject: "Whatever it is, it must have/A stomach that can digest/Rubber, coal, uranium, moons, poems . . ."

INTERVIEWER

In the one poetry textbook you edited, you represent yourself only by the "Adam and Eve" sequence. Is that the favorite of your poems, and if so, why?

SHAPIRO

It's the only thing of its kind I ever wrote. There's nothing else even remotely similar. I don't know really how or why I wrote it. I am genuinely fond of it. I like to read it at readings. I remember while I was writing it, I was editing *Poetry* and some friends of mine, one was an artist and had a gallery, asked if I would read at the opening of his show. And I said, OK, I have a poem that I'll finish. And I finished it for his deadline. I write very well for deadlines.

INTERVIEWER

Do you keep a notebook?

SHAPIRO

No. I used to, for years, and one time when I was about twenty-three I destroyed all my notebooks. I've been sorry ever since. They were full of poems, and I put them all in the furnace.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you think you did that?

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SHAPIRO

I think at the time I was writing stuff that annoyed me. Imitation Elizabethan plays and tragedies. It was probably a good idea to burn the lot.

INTERVIEWER

What are you working on now?

SHAPIRO

For about two years, I've been writing this autobiography of sorts. It's funny how I began the book. My brother, Irvin, who was a child prodigy, asked me on the telephone, "Karl, how did you become a poet?" And I didn't know the answer. So I started trying to find the answer in this book. The first thing I wrote about was meeting a professor in a railroad station, trying to get a scholarship to the university after I'd already dropped out of school. So you can see, the thing has no chronology. It's not thematic. It may even be a new form. I'm doing something which I think is interesting. I didn't want to name people, let alone drop names—I didn't even want to name myself. So I talk about myself in the third person, as The Poet, which I think of as the fourth person, because it's the poet standing outside himself looking at all these other people, which include him. I'm getting somewhere. I've got enough material now to know that I have the making of the creation of a character—the self-creation of a character who becomes a poet and discovers his identity that way. I've read parts of it to audiences and they really like it. Because it's like conversation. It's not like writing.

INTERVIEWER

Does it have a title?

SHAPIRO

At the beginning I called it *Scratchings*, and I still like that. Then I thought of *Auto-Mobile*, with a hyphen. And I think I like that better—referring to my car poems, of course, the Buick, the Cadillac, the ambulance, the auto wreck, as well as myself. Of course, I may be kidding myself, thinking people know those poems today.

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INTERVIEWER

Some do. But how bad is cultural illiteracy, based on your teaching experience?

SHAPIRO

It's very bad. I used to write about it and get flack from the writing professors, the ones who were teaching boneheading. It's begun to improve a little in the last five years. But I don't think we'll ever get back to the point at which college students used to know English when they got to the universities. The discipline has not only disappeared, it's changed so completely that there's now a greater tolerance for non-structured teaching of language. And the so-called linguists themselves, in trying to create a new vocabulary of grammar and so on, have interfered with the pedagogy of the whole thing. You can no longer make a student learn a definition of an adverb, because the theorists will tell you that those definitions are spurious. It's like the shake-up caused by the New Math, if you remember that. I'm of two minds about whether we should go back to the old Latin discipline of teaching English the way I learned it—English on the basis of Latin grammar and roots. Maybe that day is past. But I don't know who's going to provide norms or standards for the ordinary language of communication if there is not a model.

INTERVIEWER

How does this affect your creative writing classes?

SHAPIRO

My "creative" writing classes which I abhor? The subject of linguistic knowledge among the poets is something that really bothers me. It seems to me they not only read very little, but they also have no ambition to increase vocabulary and subtle grammatical structures. They don't study the niceties and the subtleties of language the way it's supposed to be their business to do. And once they get to the level in the colleges and universities where they're always taking creative writing, it's in-

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sulting to them to say, "You don't know your own language." Which in most cases is God's truth.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a sense of a public for your own work, for whom you write poems?

SHAPIRO

I'm surprised from time to time when I find evidence that people have learned something from me, or when people tell me they have. I've always tried to achieve a certain tone of voice, which I think I now have under control. It's not simply a question of locution and syntax, it's a question of hearing the tones in which people communicate with each other on various levels. And that generally involves idiom—if idiom is a synonym for a rich, spontaneous kind of language. Randall Jarrell was extremely good at this, although if you try to write like Jarrell, you're only imitating him. And Delmore Schwartz, as in his poem, "The Beautiful American Word, Sure."

INTERVIEWER

Would you encourage young people today to adopt writing as a way of life?

SHAPIRO

I've never encouraged *anybody* to do that. I think it's not only presumptuous, it's dangerous. When I first started teaching, I encouraged a few students in a couple of cases. But you can change the whole course of their career—a terrible responsibility. I wouldn't do it now. But if I ran across a talented student, I'd encourage him or her as much as I could. I used to try to direct those writing students to a job or a profession. I had a student at Davis who was very good, who said to me one day, "I'm going to go to the Academy of the Merchant Marine and be a ship's captain." I said, "Gee, that's wonderful! That'll be terrific for your poetry." Well, he went and he's still a captain of a ship somewhere. I haven't seen any more poetry from

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him. That still may be better than hanging around the academy all one's life.

INTERVIEWER

Are you about to become a New Yorker?

SHAPIRO

Perhaps a part-time New Yorker. Because of Baltimore and having lived my entire life in other parts of the country—Chicago, Nebraska, California—I find it hard to think of being here full-time. The thing I love best about living in New York is you can be as isolated as if you were in Iowa if you want to be, but if you get the sudden urge to go to a concert, it's right there. You live in Iowa, you could drive two hundred miles each way just to find something to do that night! We're also thinking of moving to San Francisco. Next to New York, that's the liveliest place.

INTERVIEWER

The last question: Why do you write?

SHAPIRO

I don't know why, but it's a compulsion. I feel that after working a long time, I've really learned how to do what I do. I enjoy it. I don't think there's anything more satisfying than turning out a good stanza or a good piece of prose. And when you're satisfied enough, you want to show it to other people. That's called publication.

—**Robert Phillips**

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Karl Shapiro

At Auden's Grave

From Vienna it's picture-postcard all the way.
Tell me, was ever such a land at ease!
The fat farms glistening, the polished pigs,
Each carven window box disgorging red
Geraniums, pencil pines and chestnut trees,
The gaily painted tractor rigs,
Steeples with onion domes that seem to say
Grüss Gott, come lie here in our flowerbed.

How many times did Auden take this train
Till that bright autumn day when he was borne
Back in a baggage car after his last
Recital, back to his horatian house,
His cave of making, now the mask outworn,
The geographical visage consummated,
Back to the village, home to the country man
Without a country, home to the urban bard
Without a city he could call his own.

But suddenly a startling word
Leaps from the signpost of the country lane,
It's AUDENSTRASSE —
The poet becomes a street, the street a poet,
English with German music mated.

Here will arrive no pilgrim mob
As in Westminster Abbey, where his name
Is chiseled next to Eliot's. The sole cab
Has never heard of Auden, has to ask
Gasthaus directions, but we find him there
Ten yards away and settled with his slab,
The bracketed dates, the modest designation,
His plot planted to suffocation
In the country style of *horror vacui.*

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Close by, a granite soldier stands
Bareheaded, bowed, without a gun,
Wearing his empty cartridge belt,
A blunt reminder of the First World War,
Signed *Unseren helden* for those villagers
Who never returned and lay somewhere in France
Entre deux guerres before the next
World War should be begun
By the ultimate twentieth century hun.

Far from his foggy isle
The poet rests in self-exile.
Earth of the great composers of the wordless art
Enshrouds this master of the English tune
Not many miles from where Beethoven scrawled his will
When he could no longer hear the trill
Of the little yellow-hammer, nor the titanic storm.
In such a place Dame Kind
Released the intellectual minstrel's form.

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Migrants

Elizabeth Tallent

Sissy isn't a small-town girl at heart—only through a steady refusal of circumstances, luck and love, to align themselves her way. Two years ago, Sissy's mother left Iowa with her boyfriend for L.A.; now they manage a trailer park of unpaved lanes and old palms whose lowest branches are dead, dry fans. Sissy's father sells the big Rain Cats, irrigation sprinklers that pivot around fields cut circular to accomodate them, the air above the pipes stunned with heat, the winter wheat below abruptly glistening, so that a long shadow seems towed by the sprinklers across a solid light-tan plane. Immediately below the pipes is the dividing line, drawn slowly forward, between drenched and parched, with the crossed wheat turning dark in a sharp stretch and throwing off a thin, prismatic spume, or entire moving rainbows no bigger than birds' wings. Someday, Rafer says in his sales pitch, all of this will be run by computers, and in a far field the linked arms of Rain Cats will spring to life whether anyone is there to see them or not.

Just after Sissy's junior year of high school, Rain Cat relocated Rafer to Wheaton, Colorado, and paid for the Mayflower van. Sissy left a boyfriend Rafer didn't know about; Rafer left

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a bowling-alley waitress Sissy did. His new territory is vast and marginal, dusty fields of wheat, alfalfa, soybeans, and sugar beets worked by wetbacks and owned by farmers who are barely making it and already have too much capital tied up in obsolete heavy equipment—the kind of men, Rafer says, who shyly tap toothpicks from the plastic dispenser beside the cash register when they finally pay for the cup of coffee they nursed all morning long, and whose own fathers were so poor they cut the eyes from potatoes, planted the eyes, and boiled the potatoes to feed their families. All spring in Wheaton, where she knows no one and nobody seems to be under forty anyway, Sissy has been lonely; all spring Rafer has been on the road. Once when she thought she was cracking up, he warned her long-distance, "Sissy, it's a good thing I'm gone. If I wasn't gone, would I be making sales?" More gently, "Don't you know I go through this all week because I want a future for you?" Gentlest of all, "You're not going to grow up into one of those women who thinks the world owes them a living."

"Daddy, don't talk like that." Because she knew he meant her mother.

"We're in this together, aren't we? You just want to keep your head. I know that I can count on you."

Rafer says she shouldn't live for the weekends, but on Saturday nights they eat steak in a restaurant and he tells her about his week. Sunday mornings they take Joe, Rafer's dog, and his old .22, and drive out to one of the arroyos where a million shattered bottles lie, and Rafer steadies her arm while she shoots chips of glass, and sometimes dimes, from the eroded wall. She likes the way the dust floats up and smokes away. When they come home her hair is always lighter, her shoulders sunburned, and she cooks dinner for them both. Joe licks Rafer's face to wake him up, weekend mornings, and Rafer lifts Joe's floppy ear and sings into it as if it's a microphone, until Joe growls.

Sissy stops her bicycle at a windmill far out in the grasslands—stops as if windmill water, scummed with algae the dead landlocked green of pool-table felt, has some faint connection to clear Rain Cat water; stops as if Rafer, wherever he is, can feel

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her stopping. Though there seems to be no wind, the windmill blades keep turning, and blades of shadow switch with light on Sissy's face. The heat pausing on her cheek is pleasant, though she's almost sure the part in her hair is burning, her forehead and nose flecking with more ugly sharp freckles. Now that she's resting, the gloss of sweat, absent throughout the long bike ride, pricks her shaved armpits—a feeling like the beginning of a rash. A mourning dove lands on the holding tank's rim, peers at Sissy, fails to see her, and flutters to the ground, which is rutted by thousands of sunbaked cattle tracks, hoping to find a track that still cradles an inch of sour water. It used to puzzle her that the birds wouldn't bathe in the holding tank, but then she figured it out—it is impossible for a dove to drown in a cattle track.

She tips her bicycle up and walks it back to the highway, studying low bluffs that fade backward into a line of identically eroded, shades-paler bluffs; under the shadows of small moving clouds, the bluffs seem to be folding and unfolding. Between her and them lie a hundred miles that are nothing but empty. After that a thousand miles, and after that L.A. Ah, she hates it here. *Hates* it. From dry weeds drawn into the bicycle spokes, a hail of grasshoppers patters against her bare legs. When their wings flick open, oval dapples form glaring eyes precise down to the fawn iris and darker pupil. The eyes wink out as the grasshoppers fasten again onto trembling grass, and Sissy looks behind her at the bicycle's snaking track. All that way for what? For nothing.

But the highway radiates a tarry heat different from the heat of the grass, and exchanging one for the other is a relief. For an hour, by the watch loose on her sweating right wrist, she is the only moving thing in that landscape. Stranded on the horizon is a peaked farmhouse, gray with weather, its frame sides narrow as shutters closed against noon. This farmhouse has always depressed Sissy. She shakes her head, the bicycle wobbles dangerously, and from behind there is a blare of sound, rusty but convincing. Astonished, she looks over her shoulder to find a gypsy line of junk cars, moving probably at thirty miles an hour, so that, as they very gradually gain on her, she can

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drink it in: the candied sweetness of hot car paint, a whiff of burning engine oil and the cigarette smoke of the drivers, who are all young Spanish men; the charred doors wired shut with coat hangers, windshields that are cobwebs of fracture sealed by a graffiti of yellowed tape; other windows ballooning with wet shirts or hung with rag-tag, brilliant bits of underwear; grandmothers sleeping in the improvised shade of diapers flapping as they dry. Sissy loves them for having appeared behind her, out of nowhere. The dusty dashes hold groves of plastic saints, and rosaries wag from the rear-view mirrors. A child sucking on its fist pushes aside a pair of fluttering pantyhose and gazes out at her. Another child pushes up beside the first, yawns widely, peels up a damp t-shirt, and shyly scratches a scarred chest. Sissy, too, feels shy. She is so exposed on the bicycle. They're migrants, she knows, up from Mexico for the summer. That too is cause for shyness, because the migrants who camp and work in the fields around Wheaton are shunned by the Anglos. Rafer has told her some cruel things he's seen.

The grown women all seem to be sleeping, many with children sprawled across their laps. Sleeping children look so much hotter than sleeping adults, Sissy thinks; they look as if they've fainted, their hands loose and their hair stuck to their foreheads. She laughs when a passing car shows the soles of two tiny bare feet resting flat against a window rolled halfway up. The heels are black. Gusts of real heat hit Sissy between the cars. She feels she belongs with them now, and doesn't like falling behind. She chooses a Cadillac with scorched fins and burnt-out taillights, and tires herself in keeping alongside it; she wonders whether the driver, who never once glances sideways, has speeded up a little to lose her, and then she wonders at the enraged alarm she feels, knowing that he has. It is a brief battle. The Cadillac noses gently, very gently, into her lane, and she is forced to slow onto the shoulder. She feels flat amazement: Why did he do that? The Cadillac eases back into line, and the cars are gone. The highway's two lanes go desolate, the silence extremely definite. She sees a Coke bottle someone threw from a window. The bottle is rolling down the yellow line above

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its own delicately coasting shadow, to a hollow tone that seems to come from far away.

In Wheaton's post office there is a clerk, near-sighted Mr. Cox, who loves twiggy young trees fresh from the nursery, and Sissy likes him for that, though he is old and often cranky. Sprinklers fret across the dozen new dogwoods staked along the sidewalks, their slim trunks bandaged in gauze like the legs of colts. "Good for you, Coxy," Sissy says to herself. In fact, according to Rafer, Mr. Cox is less hostile to wetbacks than post-office clerks in the surrounding small towns, and on Saturdays the migrants can be found, in from the fields, patiently waiting for Mr. Cox to hand them the money orders necessary to convey their entire paychecks home to Mexico. The ruined cars that passed Sissy three weeks ago in the grasslands are lined up now along the yellow curb in front of the post office. She glances into an ancient Chevrolet with a corroded hood; an empty baby bottle, its nipple dented with fine teethmarks, is nested upright in a child's torn sneaker. She shoulders open the glass door, and the men inside, scarcely turning, make way for her so subtly that she sees only their neatly shaven napes, sunburned even through the darkness of the skin, and the backs of thin white shirts showing the ghosts of undershirts. There is a good, sharp barbershop smell. She stands, biting her lower lip, while the line dissolves away from her, the men gravitating toward a wall of wanted posters, making it seem that there is something irresistible and natural in their attraction to this wall.

Mr. Cox, squinting up from his scales, sees her alone. "Well, Sissy," he says. "This is a pleasure. Come on up."

"I can't, Mr. Cox," she says. "I was last in line."

He aims around himself a mole's assessing squint, suddenly exposed to light. "No line left, Sissy."

"But there was."

"Yes," he assents, "I guess there was. You may as well take advantage."

"That's exactly it, Mr. Cox."

"What's exactly what?"

"If I came straight to you, I'd be taking advantage." She nods

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to the wall of wanted posters, but she means the men, and he knows she means the men.

Mr. Cox looks moleishly amused. "Did you see my trees, Sissy?"

"They're great trees. I like dogwoods. You did all of that?"

"Nobody else was about to," he says sourly. She has offended him. With Mr. Cox it always happens so fast. Where she has offended, Sissy has always felt an instant need to appease, and this, though nothing else would have, gets her to the counter, where she must hand over her letter to her mother, aware, suddenly, that she is being watched. She examines the backs of the silent men from the corner of her eye. One is leaning against the counter, not having removed himself as far as the others from her exchange with Mr. Cox. Rafer said that one of the migrants speaks a wary but quite good English, and stays by the counter all day, using the post-office pen on its chain of chrome beads to fill in the money-order forms for the others, who speak only Spanish. Rafer guessed that in Mexico he had been a teacher. Now, though she is not absolutely sure she is right about who he is, she smiles, the smile divided lightly between Mr. Cox and the young migrant, and falling on no one. Mr. Cox, unbemused, gives an economic lick to her stamp, and strikes it onto the letter's corner with his fist. "In here all day," he says, leaving off the *I've been* because he knows she knows that, "I forget what English is supposed to sound like. This all you came in for, Sissy? *One* stamp? We have these with wildflowers on 'em. I got the first sheets and thought of you."

She shakes her head.

"I thought you'd like 'em," he complains. "See?"

"You're busy," she says, to remind him of the migrants' silence.

"Always am, Sissy," he says. "Don't let it fool you that there's usually nobody in here. Nice to see you. Did you like those trees of mine?"

"Very much," she says.

"*Bueno hay*," he says to the young teacherlike migrant. "Let's get this damn operation underway again, *que no*?"

The migrant fingers the glossy pen at the end of its chain and pulls a fresh set of papers near. "O.K.," he says politely.

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Mr. Cox squints at the migrant and the pen with moleish rue, his mouth shut grimly. Sissy senses he dislikes this day-long appropriation, by the young teacher, of U.S. Postal Service property.

Dead, the jackrabbit lies with its legs stretched out behind it and its chin pillowed on the leaf of a wild gourd, halting the trembling of that one wide, insect-frayed leaf, though the other leaves still rock along the rabbit's back and past its outflung heels, showing here and there, within the pointed shadows the leaves cast against each other, the hot yellow trumpet of a flower. A bloody cowlick is hardening at the base of the rabbit's skull, and a stray ant searches the pads of its extended forefoot, where the claws indent the coarse fur in snug stitches, each claw a pale husk with a curved marrow of compacted dust grains. Joe shudders beside Sissy with the intensity of the effort required to *stay*; he yawns and begins to pant. Tears fall from his tongue straight to the ground, where the dust pops into craters quick as those holes that percolate in wave-wetted sand. His ears are laid back, his eyes anxiously narrowed in the guilty look of a dog who is waiting for a human to perform some minor but necessary task. She whistles, willing Joe to glance at her, but he continues to stare at the rabbit in the leaves. His sense of what is right is as severe and unswerving as his gaze: she can not shoot something and leave it to the crows.

She squats to draw the rabbit out by its hind legs, the smudged leaf, as the rabbit's head slides from it, springing up with an injured jack-in-the-box wobble. She tears a leaf away and wipes the ants from the rabbit's fur, trying to get them all, because they're red ants, and can sting. For some reason, she is being gentle. As she holds it, smearing its chest with the leaf, the rabbit has a silken-slack weight.

"All right, Joe," she says, and bends for the .22. "Is that what you wanted?" He only yawns foxily and trots away, looking back just often enough to make sure they're still a pair, that he doesn't get so far ahead that she feels abandoned: she is a responsibility Rafer has left with him. They are roughly a mile from the pickup, which she left on the highway's shoulder, and

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to get there they will cross a pair of irrigation ditches separated by an expanse of eroded furrows and wild grass dyed a starchy, faintly pink tan by the summer. Joe leaps the first irrigation ditch with several feet to spare, then circles back and wades into the massed reflections of the cattails on the bank. He drinks noisily, water striders skating between his legs, and once he snaps at a dragonfly. Sissy crosses above him on a bridge that is a single rocking plank. She lays the rabbit on the far end, puts the gun down, and takes off her sneakers. The dark water folds itself around her ankles and her reflection melts downstream in idle zebra stripes. The wind makes all of the reeds on the bank bend together, into each other, with a sound like slapping. She arches her feet and spreads her toes as wide as they will go. She examines her freckled arms for fleas from the rabbit. She shot it out of the worst sort of boredom, because it sat up in the field in front of her when Joe wasn't in the way, and she is sorry for it now. The rabbit's eye made a neat brown marble of a target, smaller than a chip of glass in the arroyo wall. This is Sunday, and Rafer was supposed to have been home last night; so it is almost sure he will be coming in tonight, and she can beg pearly garden potatoes and carrots from her neighbor, and slice them for a stew.

When she lifts her feet out, they feel silky, as if with algae, though they're quite clean. Joe looks up, water running from his jaws and chest. She picks up the gun, lifts the rabbit, and hastily changes her grip: its legs have stiffened, and the hocks resist her grasp in knuckly points, like a pair of dice. Joe is out of the water and far ahead, not even troubling to look over his shoulder this time, and she doesn't even try to keep up. The rabbit's head swings, upside down, past the arched tips of dry grasses.

Cautiously, she avoids a prickly pear that has occupied the peeling basin of an ancient tractor tire; some of the prickly pear's pads are engraved with zigzags of tire tread. In front, Joe gives two short, sharp barks—of warning—as she moves into the deep cattails of the second ditch's bank. She comes out beside Joe, who is sitting quite still on the steep bank, and together they look down at the young migrant who has been bathing there.

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The man cups his genitals in his hands and stares up at her, amazed and wild. Only after a shocked silence does she remember the gun in her hand and the rabbit she holds by its heels. She lets the rabbit slide slowly into the reeds, which fan closed over it, and then kneels in studied slow motion, still facing the migrant, to lay the gun behind her, within reach but on the ground. She stays like that—very nearly kneeling, very nearly at eye level with the man in the stream.

His eyes are large, his lips drawn away from his teeth in a fear so extreme it seems unreal to her. She tries to think whether she has ever really frightened, really terrified, anyone in her life before, and knows that she hasn't—not like this, and not even close. A thin white shirt is pinned like a kite in the cattails behind him. He had wanted to keep it dry, or air his sweat from the cloth, and this is a revelation of his fastidiousness, of something as private as his nakedness. She loves the half-floating, half-sagging shirt. She shakes her head softly, meaning it as an apology to him. She wants to apologize for coming so suddenly through the reeds, for forgetting the gun, for the way Joe is watching him, a strict surveillance. For everything. He must have understood what she wanted, because he says—oddly, perhaps even ironically, but with a certain sweetness—"*Mil gracias.*" It is a phrase she has always liked. A thousand is so many, so generous.

Then, startled at seeing what—distracted by his nakedness—she hadn't seen before, she is sure that she knows him, that he is the school teacher from the post office. It is so quiet that she can hear the water running between his thighs. "*De nada*," she says. It is nothing.

It isn't nothing. She has seen in his face how scared he was, and she watches the significance of this dawn on him. He bends forward until the water laps across his flat belly. It is an awkward position, but his body to the chest is hidden from her. He is still cupping himself, under the water. She can see his hands dimly.

"Do you speak any English?" she says.

His hair is dripping into his eyes, and he no longer wishes to look at her; it is as if he has an answer, and is deliberately,

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warily withholding it. She likes the clean line of his cheekbone, the gravely downcast glance, but there is something mocking and set about his dark upper lip, where the mustache is a feathery trace. He looks over his shoulder to his shirt. She understands that this means she should now back away; she should let him get his shirt. She almost wants, so silently instructed, to do so, yet she wants—it is so exquisitely clear what she wants that she can't, for the fraction of an instant, condemn herself for wanting it—to watch him rise from the water.

Joe releases them from the game of statues. He laps noisily from the ditch and sniffs at the young migrant, who holds out his hand shyly. Joe ignores the hand. It is tipped up slightly, the cunning fingers curled and at ease, the palm a grid of old cuts, some healed, others healing. The man begins to make coaxing noises, musical little whimpers. Coins of light reflected from the current float over his dark shoulders like minute spotlights. His chest, when he extends his arm, is adazzle. He smiles to himself at the dog's stubbornness. She knows that he will never, if he can help it, look at her again. He knows something is wrong with her from the way she is just standing there, but he doesn't know what it is, or how to free himself of her.

"You could talk to me if you wanted," she says. "Please? *Por favor*? You don't understand. I've heard you. I know you."

She tries to think if there is anything else she can say. There isn't. There simply isn't. She doesn't know any more Spanish. The man in the stream whines gently, like a dog.

That night, to make up for having been gone longer than he'd warned her he would be, and for whatever else it is that is wrong (something is), Rafer drives her the forty miles north to Cheyenne for a movie. She watches the red taillights of the car before them blink and ellide into the corner of his eye like a tear swept sideways by the wind. Then the red light vanishes and his eye is clear and dark until another set of taillights appears in it. She wonders where, in the unlit fields stretching away from the highway, the young migrant is, and what his life will be like after this. Rafer takes her hand in the dusk of

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the theater before the movie begins, rubs their two sets of knuckles along the armrest, and whispers, "This was a long way to come for a movie. You ought to feel properly grateful," and though for a moment she is, she does feel that, she whispers back, "Daddy, I want a bus ticket to L.A."

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Craig Nova lives in Vermont. His new novel, *The Congressman's Daughter*, from which this story is excerpted, will be published by Delacorte this summer.
Bette Pesetsky is the author of *Digs*, *Stories up to a Point*, and *Author from a Savage People*. She has received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.
H. G. Sanders is a former intelligence officer, retired to the Pacific Northwest after a career focused on operations in East and Southeast Asia. He has completed a collection of short stories related to intelligence activities and is at work on a novel and a screenplay.
Elizabeth Tallent is the author of *In Constant Flight*, a collection of stories, and a novel, *Museum Pieces*. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Best American Short Stories*, *O. Henry Prize Stories Collection*, and *The Pushcart Prize Collection*. She lives in New Mexico.

POETRY

Mary Barnard's "Song for the Northern Quarter" is an excerpt from a long poem entitled *Time and the White Tigress* (winner of the 1986 Western States Book Award for poetry), to be published in the fall of 1986 by Breitenbush Books. Her *Collected Poems* appeared in 1979. She lives in Vancouver, Washington.
Ruth Danon lives in New York City. Her work appears this spring in *The Boston Review*, *Bomb*, and *Another Chicago Magazine*.
Gavin Ewart's many volumes of poetry published in England include *The Collected Ewart* and *The New Ewart*. A selection of his work, *The Gavin Ewart Show: Selected Poems 1939–1985*, has just been issued in America by Bits Press.
Brad Gooch is the author of *The Daily News* (Z Press), a book of poems, and *Jailbait and Other Stories*. His work has appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *The Nation*, *The American Poetry Review*, and *Partisan Review*. He lives in New York and teaches at Columbia University.
Donald Hall, the first poetry editor of *The Paris Review*, will publish his eighth book of poems this spring. He is the author of many other works of fiction, drama criticism, and belles lettres, including most recently, *Fathers Playing*

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Catch with Sons, which has just been issued in paperback by Dell. He is the poet laureate of New Hampshire.

Lincoln Kirstein's best-known collection of poems is *Rhymes and More Rhymes of a PFC*. He is also the author of numerous works of fiction and criticism and is the cofounder of the New York City Ballet and the School of American Ballet. He lives in New York.

Jane Miller's prose poems *Black Holes, Black Stockings*, written in collaboration with Olga Broumas, was published this winter by Wesleyan University Press. She currently teaches at the University of Iowa.

N. Scott Momaday is a painter, a poet, and a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist. He lives in Arizona.

Joyce Carol Oates is the author of many books of fiction and poetry. Her most recent book is *Marya: A Life* (Dutton).

Toby Olson's *We Are the Fire: A Selection of Poems* was published by New Directions in 1984. His new novel, *The Woman Who Escaped from Shame*, will be published this spring.

Robert Pack is the author of many books of poetry. He teaches at Middlebury College, where he directs the Bread Loaf Writers Conference.

Sarah Plimpton's poems have appeared in French and American publications, including *Partisan Review* and *The Denver Quarterly Review*. She is the author of *Single Skies* (Living Hand Press). She lives in New York and Paris.

Karl Shapiro is the author of numerous books of poetry and criticism, and a novel. An interview with him appears in this issue.

David Trinidad is the author of two books of poetry, *Pavane* (Sherwood Press) and *Monday, Monday* (Cold Calm Press). A chapbook, *Living Doll*, is forthcoming from Illuminati Press. He lives in Los Angeles.

FEATURE

Judi Culbertson and **Tom Randall** live in Port Jefferson, New York. Culbertson has co-authored two books, *Games Christians Play* and *The Little White Book on Race*. Tom Randall's photographs have appeared in the travel sections of many American newspapers. Chelsea Green Publishing Company of Vermont will publish Culbertson and Randall's book, *Permanent Parisians: An Illustrated Guide to the Cemeteries of Paris*, this year.

INTERVIEWS

Shusha Guppy is the London Editor of *The Paris Review*, and a regular contributor to the *Daily Telegraph*, British *Vogue*, and other periodicals.

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Robert Phillips is a writer and critic whose most recent book is *Personal Accounts: New and Selected Poems 1966–1986* (Ontario Review Press). He recently edited *The Letters of Delmore Schwartz* and *The Stories of Denton Welch*. He is a contributing editor of *The Paris Review*.

ART

Donald Baechler was born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1956 and lives in New York. Recent one-man exhibitions of his paintings and drawings have been held at Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York, and Galerie Ascan Crone, Hamburg.

Michael Hurson was born in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1941 and lives in New York. His paintings and drawings have been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, The Clocktower, New York, The Art Institute of Chicago, and a recent one-man exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Julie Wachtel was born in New York in 1956, and lives in New York. Her paintings have been shown in recent one-woman exhibitions at Diane Brown Gallery, New York, and Nature Morte Gallery, New York.

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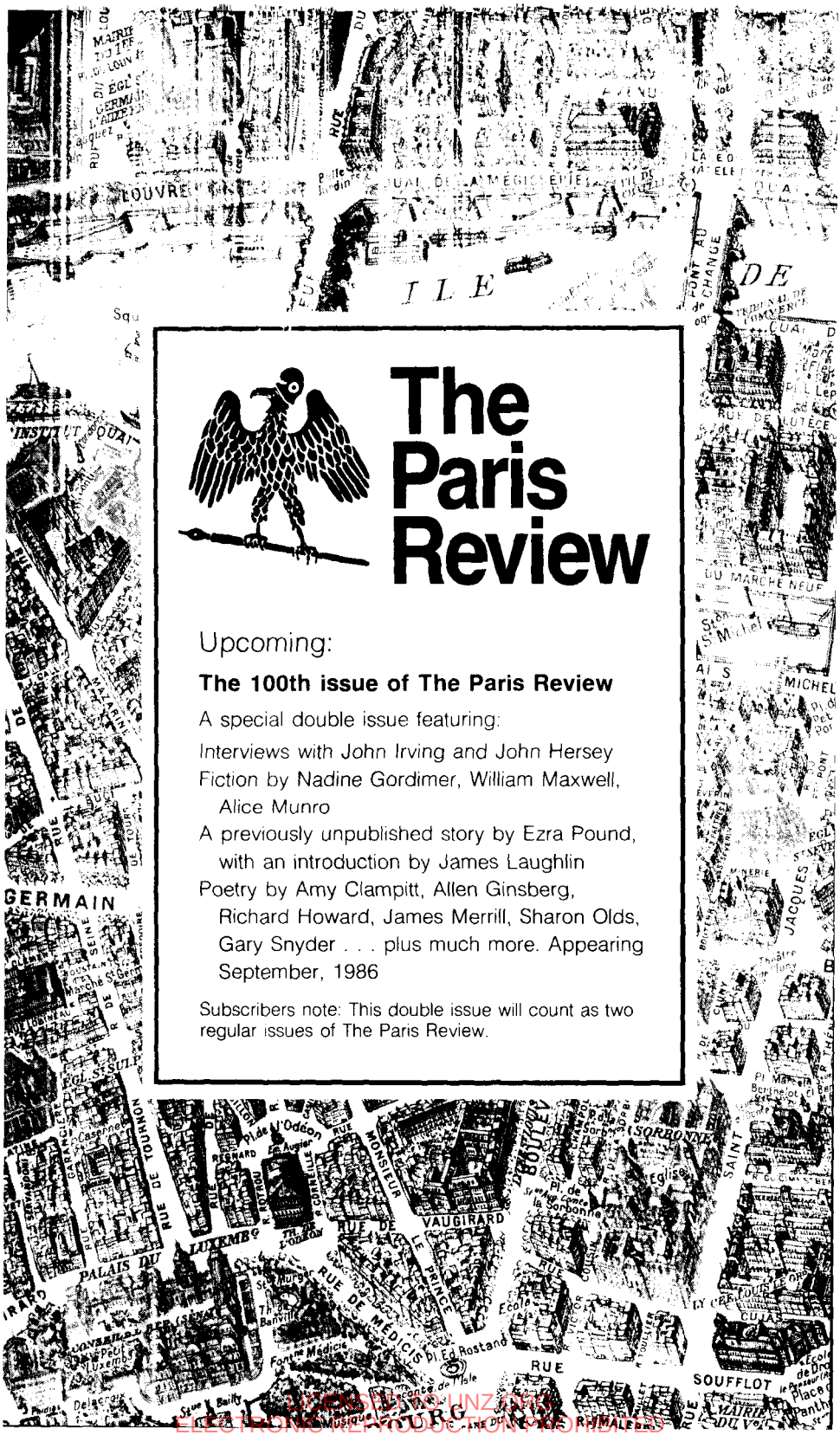

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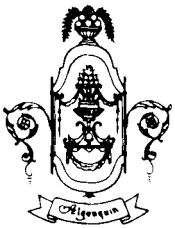

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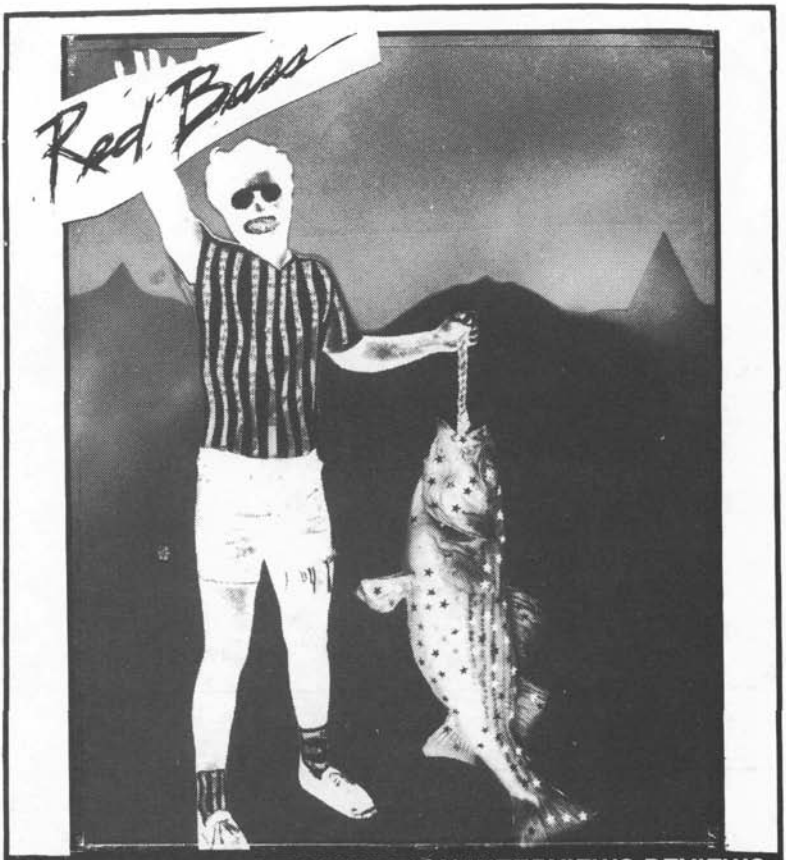

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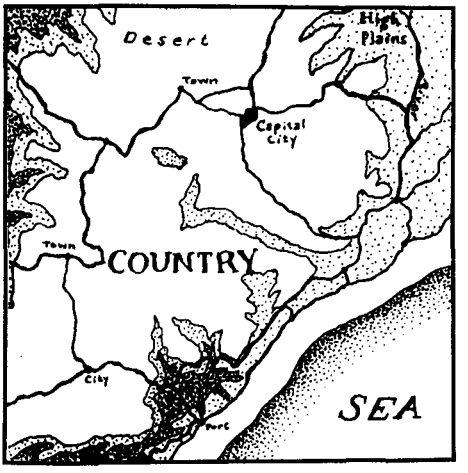

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